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CHRISTINE

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І МІСЦЯ

Історія науки та народознання—записки А. ГІЛЬДІ в сорока
дванадцяти випусків—загальні та окремі

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CONTENTS.

CHAPTER I.

Stockholm in Winter—A Skating Scene—Introduction of the Principal Characters in the Story—Winter Sunsets in the North,	5
--	---

CHAPTER II.

A Fashionable Ball—Mme. de Rudden—Comparison of the Swedish with the French Women—A Waltz and a Supper—Supper-Table Confidences.	17
--	----

CHAPTER III.

Love's Young Dream—A Chance Meeting—La Montée des Lions—A Disappointment,	37
---	----

CHAPTER IV.

Absence—Correspondence,	40
-----------------------------------	----

CHAPTER V.

Chateau de Skokloster—A Surprise—A Tête-à-Tête—A Declaration—A Perfumed Handkerchief—Leave-Taking,	45
--	----

CHAPTER VI.

Correspondence—Letter from George de Simaine to Henry de Piennes, at Munich—Christine de Rudden to Maia de Bjorn at Copenhagen.	59
---	----

CHAPTER VII.

Christine Returns to Stockholm,	66
---	----

CHAPTER VIII.

Life at the Villa—Baron de Vendel—More Correspondence,	67
--	----

CHAPTER IX.

Christine—Love in a Cottage,	86
--	----

CONTENTS.

CHAPTER X.

- Last Day at the Villa—A Parting—Return of the Major—Life at Stockholm, 88

CHAPTER XI.

- An Entertainment—Nadéje—First Unfaithfulness—Reconciliation—Doubts
and Uncertainties, 92

CHAPTER XII.

- A Wolf Hunt on Lake Mælar—Desperation of the Wolves—A Run-a-way—A
Declaration of Love—The Return, 110

CHAPTER XIII.

- The Ball after the Hunt—The Supper—The Dance—Correspondence, 123

CHAPTER XIV.

- Gossip, and its Consequences, 139

CHAPTER XV.

- A Wedding and a Souvenir—an Unknown Organist, 143

CHAPTER XVI.

- Maïa, Christine and the Major, 149

CHAPTER XVII.

- The Beginning of the End—Interview of the Count and Maïa—Death-Bed, . 153

CHAPTER XVIII.

- Conclusion, 169

CHRISTINE.

CHAPTER I.

STOCKHOLM IN WINTER — A SKATING SCENE — INTRODUCTION OF THE PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS IN THE STORY — WINTER SUNSETS IN THE NORTH.

LAKE MÆLAR,* whose long arms project in all directions, affords a direct means of communication between Sweden and the Baltic Sea ; and, in the beautiful days of the winter season, it presents an interesting spectacle. Penetrating by its thousand inlets the recesses

* NOTE BY THE TRANSLATOR.—Some of the most interesting scenes in this story occur on this lake, and they may, perhaps, be better understood with the following description of it, taken from one of the gazetteers :

“ It is very irregular in shape, and throws out arms which penetrate the land in all directions, giving its contour a very ragged appearance. Another remarkable feature is the vast number of islands which cover its surface. About 1,300 have been counted. Its breadth varies from two to twenty-three miles. Some of the finest buildings in Stockholm are upon these islands. Owing to the number of these islands the direct course of navigation is constantly changing, and it looks as if you were being carried, not across a lake, but along the windings of a beautiful river ; now narrowing so as to be almost enclosed by rocky precipices, now widening out and pursuing a majestic course between distant, fertile and richly-wooded shores.”

of the great city, which is built almost on its waves, so soon as the cold December comes, it covers with a sea of solid and transparent ice, the boulevard *de Gand*, the Hyde Park, the Bois de Boulogne, the Prater of Stockholm. It is the rendezvous of fashion for Sweden, and the stranger will see there in the space of a couple of hours, everything that is marvelous or elegant in this lovely capital. The beautiful gulf which here dips and curves towards the east is, for the city of Charles XII—this Venice of the north—what the Grand Canal is for the city of the Doges. People assemble and promenade and skate on its bosom. All Stockholm is there from two o'clock until four P. M., as all Paris is, from four to six, at the lake or the cascade.

On a bright afternoon in February, 184—, a sledge driven at great speed crossed *la Place des Chevaliers*, on which they had not yet erected the statue of King Charles-John XIV., and leaving the noble palace of *Riddarhaus* on its right, dashed upon the lake at the point where one of its arms is inflected as if it would enfold the city in its embrace.

Two young gentlemen, completely enveloped in furs, occupied the back seat of the sledge.

“How beautiful this is, chevalier!” said one of them, rising to get a better view of the vast extent of the scene; “it seems to me that I have, for the first time in my life, obtained an idea of whiteness; this universal covering of snow attracts me, dazzles me, and attracts me again. It gives to the atmosphere an indescribable brilliancy; I have never before seen such a pure light, which everything reflects, and nothing changes! It is really beautiful.”

“Mon Dieu!” replied the other; “I know very well

that it is not equal to Paris. Nothing can equal Paris, my dear count ! I admit, however, that this first *coup d'œil* is charming."

"I know all the great cities of Europe," replied the first speaker, "and I declare to you that I have never beheld so magnificent a spectacle."

"Then I am happy that I have been able to offer you so agreeable a welcome on your arrival among us. You diplomatists are a little spoiled ; you cull the flowers from every place you visit, and then take your leave."

The young man smiled, but did not reply. It is a prudent habit which never compromises any one ; he had learned it with a pupil of Talleyrand, when he first began his public career.

The count's name was George de Simaine. For a long time attached to the French legation at a small German court, he had now come as secretary to the ambassador to Sweden. He had hardly been two hours in Stockholm, when he had the good fortune to meet an old friend of other days, the Chevalier Axel de Valborg, king's chamberlain, who had been in the habit of visiting at the house of the count's mother in Paris, Madame la Marquise de Simaine, during the whole winter.

Those who have never lived in northern countries know nothing of the new phases of life which each winter presents to them. For weeks the snow falls in thick and heavy flakes, or, rather, it is so abundant and so compact, that you do not really know whether it falls or not. You walk in the midst of a cloud of cold, floating down ; you are enveloped in a white whirlwind ; at every step you take it seems to contract around you, and to enlace you in its white and downy fetters. The ground under your feet is snow ; the sky above your

head is snow ; everything is snow ! There is no longer in the world but one element, and that is snow ! It is then that the traveler is to be pitied ; for instinct proves a better guide than reason, and he pushes his way only at great hazard and half-blinded : his horses hang their heads sorrowfully, and, not being able to distinguish their accustomed paths, proceed, as they are driven on, without knowing where ; if you stop, if you turn your eyes, if you allow yourself to be distracted even for a single moment, you will never recover your uncertain route ; you are lost ! Your ear, which seeks in vain for a vibration in this mute atmosphere, is frightened at the lugubrious stillness, the symbol of death. The snow falls noiselessly, and your footstep makes no sound ; only from time to time a raven flaps his sombre and heavy wings in the white space above, and measures, with a doleful croaking, the intervals of this painful silence.

But after it has been snowing for a long time, when the plain, the mountains and the woods have received their winter's costume, the scene changes its aspect. An immense covering of white is spread over the whole face of nature ; the valleys are elevated, the mountains depressed, and the whole country seems to be on the same dead level. Sweden is only one immense plain, unfolding from horizon to horizon, for five hundred leagues, its infinite perspectives. When towards noon the fog, moved by a slight breeze, is dissipated, when nothing troubles the transparent blue of the ether, the sun shines with an incomparable brilliancy upon the immaculate snow. There is I know not what of light gayety in the keen and dry air and the rays which burst upon the brilliant surface, pro-

jecting into the serene atmosphere a dazzling light. The scene changes when you enter the woods. The brown heads of the large fir-trees are powdered with hoar frost ; their long, dry and barren arms arrest the snow in its fall, and it rests upon the branches looking like so much wool torn from the fleece. The long needles of the pines are freighted with diamond crystallizations and icicled girandoles ; the sparkling gems of winter's casket run from one tree to another, like the pendants of a constellated lustre reflecting a thousand fires on the faces of their prisms. In the environs of Stockholm these grand spectacles take on a character stranger still. Civilization, of which this elegant city is an ardent home, mingles with nature, and man animates with his presence the magic scene of the landscape.

The day on which our story begins, the inhabitants of the entire city seemed to have come out upon the beautiful lake, whose dazzling ice was everywhere furrowed with sledges, and by skaters who were skimming over its surface in swarms. The little islands lying on the rocks, which during the season of spring resemble, in the distance, bouquets of flowers in their cups of granite and porphyry, gaily oppose the contrast of their deep verdure to the monotonous white of the surrounding plain.

One of these islets, a quarter of a league from Stockholm, was covered by a compact and somewhat noisy crowd. On the side of the city it was hollowed out in the form of a deep crescent, whose extremities were garnished with a double row of black firs and silver larch trees, interspersed with willows, their brown buds nestling on branches of a pale green. This little shel-

tered bay served as a favorite arena for the skaters, who were anxious to exhibit their grace and agility before an *élite* of judges, covered down to their eyes with fur caps, and up to their ears in fur capes.

Several ladies descended from their sledges and, leaning upon the arms of their cavaliers, ornamented the front rank, and followed with an unquiet eye—as people with us follow the hazards of a steeple-chase—the movements of some half a dozen of these *virtuosi*, who, in their games, described a thousand varying curves; making arabesque figures, embroidering festoons, inventing forms, and in the midst of their endless intertwinnings, rapidly tracing mysterious figures which they as rapidly effaced. A young officer of the guards, rosy and blonde as a cherub, particularly attracted the attention of the promenading belles. Nothing could equal the suppleness and the strength of his muscles of steel; he slid through a thousand obstacles without ever discomposing himself, and passed through the midst of groups of people without touching the fur of a pelisse or brushing the basque of a dress. All at once, at the height of his enthusiasm, he stopped, and, balancing himself on the heel of a single skate, by a series of precipitate whirls, he traced on the ice—which was all the time crackling with short and sharp cracks—a dozen or more circles of the same size, each intersecting the other with perfect regularity. A flattering murmur of applause arose on all sides, and the young man was saluted with a triple salvo of cheers.

“*She is not here after all!*” said the young man, stooping to whisper in the ear of the Chevalier Valsborg.

“That is her sledge passing now,” replied the latter;

"to tell the truth, I think it is empty ; but her horses have seen you, perhaps, and that is the same thing."

"Hardly," replied the other, laughing ; and he sprang upon the polished ice again.

George had followed with his eyes the direction in which the two Swedes had looked. He perceived in the distance a sledge, apparently empty, which was rapidly going towards the north.

As the sport of skating is not precisely a diplomatic amusement, the Count de Simaine found these exercises very interesting at first, to become sufficiently monotonous finally, and he demanded that they should continue their ride. The driver followed the same route the sledge he had just observed had taken.

Soon a moving point on the horizon was seen ; something black on the white snow. It was the same sledge, which was now returning. It approached with an unheard-of rapidity, and they were able after a few moments to distinguish the red harness of four black ponies of that race—the smallest in Europe, but the most intrepid—who run with the wind. I am mistaken ; they bounded rather than run ; they threw up the snow with their feet until it enveloped them in a transparent whirlwind ; their eyes sparkled like coals of fire ; their noses emitted clouds of smoke, and in rapidly throwing their heads up and down, they shook their thick and rough manes, which were covered with hoar frost.

When the sledges met, neither party slackened his pace, and George was just able to perceive a woman, half-buried under a blue foxskin, who appeared to be still young. He could not distinguish her features, but in seeing her pass thus, in her rapid flight, he remembered the legend of the divinities of Walhalla, the

Valkyries, beautiful and cold, who traverse the heavens, bearing in their arms the souls of their friends.

"Are we going much farther?" inquired M. de Simaine; "I am growing cold."

The Chevalier Valborg replied only by a malicious look, and contented himself with whistling after a peculiar fashion—a wise economy of words in a country where they might freeze in the air before arriving at their destination. However, they soon turned back.

"Who is this lady who saluted you with her hand?" asked the count of the chevalier.

"It is the Countess de Rudden; they call her here the Countess Christine."

"Who are *they*?"

"Every body."

"They talk about her, then?"

"Yes; she is not an indifferent object to any one. You did not see her; you would not be able to recognize her if you were to see her again."

"Do you believe it?"

"I am sure of it; and yet you are asking me who she is?"

"Suppose I have not asked you anything about her, then."

"Be it so; but you must know that, if people do talk about her, it is not after the manner you would suspect."

"But I swear to you that I did not understand it in any bad sense."

"Madame de Rudden is one of those ladies who have no enemies."

"It is thus that a man of the world should speak of all women."

"Yes; but I speak sincerely."

"And this officer of the guards who said '*she—*'"

"He is one among a thousand aspirants. He counts for nothing."

"That is for her to say. But it may at least be permitted one to remark that your countess gives herself very strange airs; to be riding alone in her sledge, drawn at a gallop on the snow by four little monsters like those. I take her for a great artist; she understands marvelously well the *mise en scène*."

"She! she is the simplest woman in the world."

"Chevalier, there is no such thing as a simple woman; the most *naïve* is more of a *roué* than ten men could be. But as we return, I am curious to see her."

"That is precisely what I told you."

"I do not understand."

"You have hardly arrived here and, like all the butterflies of Stockholm, you are dying to burn your wings at this brilliant flame."

"Do n't be alarmed, my dear chevalier, it is a long time since I have had any wings to burn. They are of no use in diplomacy, we trim them as we do our moustaches."

"Then there is less danger," said Axel, laughing.

The two young men were approaching the place where the skaters were pursuing their sport. The piercing eye of George had already recognized the long and narrow sledge of the countess, and her island ponies, who were stamping the snow with their impatient feet. A little group of people already surrounded Mme. de Rudden. She perceived the two new comers, who were at some distance in the crowd. She cast a

careless glance at M. de Simaine, but recognized with a very cordial manner the Chevalier de Valborg.

George at first sight thought that she was about thirty years old, and handsome, but judged her cold, and a little haughty as well. Her complexion was of that kind of paleness which may be compared to ivory, but gave no hint of delicate health, and she had not on her cheek bones, as nearly all the fair Swedes have, those tufts of roses with which the intense cold adorns their cheeks. She had raised her veil and her brown and gold colored fillets of hair escaped from under her chapeau, and fell in soft waves down the whole length of a somewhat long face. Two large eyes of so deep a blue, that at a little distance they seemed to be black, animated her face, which was very expressive even in repose. A large bouquet of azaleas was lying in her lap by the side of her muff. Every one who came up to speak to her expressed a respectful deference, and she showed towards all, that polite, graceful and dignified manner, which everywhere distinguishes the high-born lady.

"Shall I present you?" inquired the chevalier of his friend.

"I do not see the necessity."

"You are afraid."

"No, unfortunately."

"Why, unfortunately?"

"Because fear is the beginning of love, like wisdom; and wisdom is a good thing; so is love, too."

"Come along, then."

"Some other time you may demand this favor of Mme. de Rudden, . . . but here in the open air . . . where she could not well refuse. . . . Excuse me,

chevalier ; you know that I am somewhat a stickler for form."

" You are not yet accustomed to the simple manners of the people of the north. This will come by and by, and love also."

It was now three o'clock. The shades of night fall early in these high latitudes. The countess returned to her villa and the crowd followed as an escort, but George and the chevalier were not of the number. They drove on their own way, carefully noting the peculiarities of the place and of the people.

Before them lay Stockholm, proudly reposing upon her three granite islands, between Lake Mælar and the Baltic, designing its elegant silhouette upon the pale sapphire of the sky. The spires of its churches, the roofs of its houses, the domes of its palaces reflected the rays of the setting sun, which were prolonged in trains of fire on the snow. Nothing can equal the splendor of these magnificent adieux of the sun to the short days of the north. The immense body of flame descends by degrees and with a solemn grandeur. Arrived at the extreme border of the horizon, he hesitates, and stops, and then, even when he disappears, he seems so near, that you always suspect his presence ; the sky in the west assumes its most ardent tints, it is a radiant palette, in which the richest shades are continually dissolving. There are perhaps only two primitive colors, red and yellow, but they are so confounded and combined, as to present a warm harmony of the most radiant tones.

This light, which is born in the horizon in the form of a deep purple band, dies away in the zenith in the midst of bright, orange flakes, which modulate the transition to a sombre azure ; now it changes from

one tint to another, when suddenly it flashes up again and again, like a voice which is reflected by echoes, whose vibrations cross each other repeatedly in the sonorous air; sometimes one tint seems superposed upon another, whose immensity even seems to be redoubled by the contrast; sometimes large clouds present strange pictures; chariots with glittering wheels; thrones of gold; palaces of fantastic architecture, crumbling under the wind, elevated upon the sea, mounting in the sky, and rapidly spreading themselves upon this resplendent foundation of gold and of fire. One can understand now, how it is that Odin, in the face of such sublime spectacles, places the paradise of heroes up among the clouds.

However, the last rays vanish, the splendors are effaced; the lilac tufts replace the bouquets of roses; the fawn-colored tints of glittering gold succeed the delicate paleness of silver, and finally it is night's turn; night, serene and limpid, whose shadows reflect the brilliancy of pearls, variegated with the lacteal glimmer of opals.

George was a poet by nature, and this magnificent scene made an impression upon him, which he had never before experienced. He who knows himself best has always in his heart some secret corner, into which the light does not penetrate every day. And then unconsciously to him, the pensive look of the countess followed him everywhere; he surprised himself even once or twice, thinking of her. But as, in his capacity of diplomatist, he considered that speech was given to man for the purpose of hiding his thoughts, he was careful even not to mention her name.

The two friends habitually dined together at a club, and went to the theatre or the opera three times a week,

where they met the aristocratic society of Stockholm. George regularly scrutinized every box; but he never saw the Countess de Rudden.

CHAPTER II.

A FASHIONABLE BALL — MME. DE RUDDEN — COMPARISON OF THE SWEDISH WITH THE FRENCH WOMEN — A WALTZ AND A SUPPER — SUPPER-TABLE CONFIDENCES.

ON the following evening the President of the House of Nobles gave one of the grandest routs of the season.

George received an invitation, as a matter of course. He went in company with his ambassador. The balls of the fashionable world of Stockholm are very brilliant. The Swedes call themselves the French of the North; they love pleasure, and pursue it with an ardor entirely meridional. The company was large, and beautiful women were there in great numbers. George ran his eye over the moving squadrons, looking for Christine. He did not see her. He was young, and had lived too long in Germany not to love the dance; he accepted, therefore, the civilities offered to him, and danced several times with some of the fashionable ladies, who were made very happy for the opportunity offered them of giving to a stranger a favorable idea of Swedish hospitality.

Madame de Rudden entered while he was dancing a redowa; she traversed the saloon with that air of gra-

cious majesty which never forsook her. George did not turn his head, but he watched all her movements in the mirrors ; he led his partner nearer to her, so as to get a closer view, and in doing so touched her dress. But Mme. de Rudden was only once seen in the crowd, which had become already a little noisy ; really distinguished ladies never dance after they pass their twentieth year ; they leave this pleasure to those who have no other. She retired to one of those boudoirs disposed around the saloon, which serve as nooks for discreet conversation. Some gentlemen were gathered around her, and she became the centre of a little group. George soon discovered that Swedish redowas were very tedious, and when he finally conducted his partner to a seat, he approached the boudoir where the countess sat. She was arrayed in the Paris fashion, and was considered one of the most elegantly dressed women in Stockholm. No one knew better than she how to take a seat gracefully : a far more difficult act than people generally suppose. Crinoline was not yet known, and hoops of steel had not yet been worn to swell ladies' skirts into Sebastopols of velvet and silk. But Christine had a particular mode of wearing her numerous and supple folds, and she gave an air of distinction to the modern costume, so easily made ridiculous with badly dressed people. M. de Simaine had too good an eye for form not to make all these remarks at first sight ; with him the smallest things had their importance, and it was always through the eyes that these impressions were received. The countess wore, this evening, a black velvet robe, whose corsage was perhaps a little high, and half hid her shoulders, but revealed, in a striking manner, all the beauty of her

neck ; a little long, but gracefully posed and slightly adorned. It was at once magnificent and simple ; then it was chaste, as true beauty always is. The most seductive of all the graces is the grace of decency. Women seem to forget it sometimes ; men, never.

The countess was seated on a grand fauteuil, her head thrown back and partly turned, the better to listen to the conversation of the gentlemen around her. This pose, which seemed so natural, a coquette would have chosen, for it displayed the intelligent beauty of her face to marvelous advantage. It was brilliantly lighted from above by a flood of light, which bathed her hair and played upon her transparent temples, growing fainter and fainter as it fell down the oval of her face. In following the ray of her eye, which seemed lost in a dreamy haze, one divined that she was made to be the recipient of heaven's best favors.

George stopped a moment on the threshold of the boudoir, and looked at her with the penetrating and sagacious eye of a man who has often looked at women.

"Well," said the Chevalier Valborg, who came up and joined him ; "What do you say to her ?"

"She is truly beautiful !"

"And sensible."

"That her husband would know."

"She is a widow."

"She has, then, all the recommendations."

"Shall I present you ?"

"I have no objection. Be it so."

"What coldness !"

"Upon my word, chevalier, do as you please ; but I never could endure your perfect women ! You tell me too much of this one."

"Believe only the half of it, then."

"That would still be too much ; I am sure that she will be ridiculously spoiled and pretentious."

"That is where you are mistaken ; she is as simple as she is charming."

"Say at once that she is the eighth wonder of the world, and we will say no more about her. The orchestra are playing a mazourka ; I am going to dance."

"With her ?"

"No, truly ; with this little *retroussé* nose, who is pouting in the corner of the chimney."

"I see," said the chevalier, "I was right yesterday, when I said you were afraid."

Whether it happen to a man or to a woman, in a quadrille or at an assault in the trenches, this word fear, in another's mouth, sounds always badly in the ear of a Frenchman. George re-entered the boudoir, which he had already quitted. The men with whom the countess had been talking had retired, one by one, behind her fauteuil, and looking towards the door of the saloon, she perceived the two young men. Axel took his friend by the arm, and approaching Mme. de Rudden, he presented M. de Simaine, according to the rules, and with the forms of the most ceremonious etiquette.

The countess received the new comer with the amiable grace which distinguished her, and with her fan indicated a seat to him, near to her own. Axel stood before them, and waited until the ice should be sufficiently broken ; then he recollect ed that he was engaged to dance, and he left George and the countess, tête-à-tête, in the midst of the crowd.

George was very cold ; the countess very reserved ;

it was necessary to pass quite through the hackneyed generalities, which are always the frivolous and worldly *début* of the most serious relations ; then by degrees, as if they mutually understood each other, they became confidential, and were on the most intimate terms. Conversation between them touched upon every subject, as will happen to people to whom a thousand things are equally well known and familiar.

George studied the face of the countess attentively, and appeared to admire her, perhaps a little too much.

"Do you know," said she, "that your praises are not flattering ? They mark a certain astonishment which you express in spite of yourself. They say that at Paris you look upon us as barbarians, barbarians of the North. I have seen that stated in one of your fashionable books. You Frenchmen are so highly civilized !"

"Too much so, perhaps. But you are not wanting in this respect ; only you are different from us."

"Will you explain the difference ?"

"At this moment I am taking notes, and it shall be the object of a memorandum that I shall address to the Great Powers, after dedicating it to you."

"I am afraid I shall have to wait a long time, and I regret it for the subject seems to me piquant ; you have had the good fortune to travel enough to enable you to make comparisons. I have never quitted Sweden, and I do not regret it ; I only should like to see Paris. Are the French ladies really so handsome ?"

"Sometimes, but — "

"There is a but, then !"

"Alas, yes ; their beauty nearly always has more of brilliancy than of charm, they lack a certain I know

not what of heart, which one finds only among the races of the North. Except in the case of a grand passion, rare everywhere, rare especially with them, their beauty shines for all the world like the sun at mid day."

" You seem to me to be a subtle casuist in such matters, and I should like to know what you think of — ”

" The Swedish women ? ”

" Oh, a general opinion.”

" Very well,” said George, “ if you will permit an astronomical comparison, I should say that on this side of the Baltic you are more often beautiful in the fashion of those bright stars, which rise at midnight and keep their sweet rays for two solitary eyes.”

" You are a poet, count.”

" Alas no, madame, I am a diplomatist.”

" You illustrate with a happy image, an idea too flattering perhaps for my compatriots. I do not know if it be true, but I wish it were.”

" However,” said George, looking at her in such a way as not to dissimulate his admiration, “ there are beauties so radiant, that it would be perhaps unjust to reduce them to the simple rôle of stars ; they would have a right to complain.”

" They would certainly not be reasonable then, for it would be difficult even for a woman to ascend higher.”

" And then,” said George, raising his eyes, “ these chaste stars might often have more than one worshiper ! ”

" And they know nothing of it ! ” replied Christine, smiling.

" That is an additional misfortune, madam.”

"For whom? the stars?"

"No; for those who are gazing at them."

A cloud passed over the face of the young diplomatist; melancholy took possession of him, and he appeared to abandon himself to a profound reverie.

"Do your observations stop here?" demanded Christine; "I regret it, for you have interested me."

"I have always thought," he replied, "that the women of your country understood even more than was expressed."

Christine turned towards him with an open and frank expression of face, her eyes rested a moment on those of the young man, then she turned away with an expression of uncertainty and annoyance. Nothing in the world was less capable of pleasing her than a hackneyed compliment; the small coin of gallantry was not receivable with her. One gets on more rapidly at Paris than at Stockholm. The countess knew it and put herself on her guard. It was useless, she was not attacked. George was sometimes a little free in his conversation, but he knew when to stop; and this was evidence of that supreme tact which a good knowledge of the world alone can give.

The music from the orchestra was now heard in the boudoir, and M. de Simaine profited by the occasion to interrupt the current of ideas which perhaps was carrying the mind of Christine away from him.

"You dance, madame?" said he, resuming his light and gay manner.

"No longer."

"Is it a resolution?"

"Confirmed."

"Will you not change it?"

"I think not."

"Is it because _____?"

"Go on."

"_____ I have a desire to waltz."

"Ah, the reason is good," said Christine; "but there are the three daughters of the Austrian ambassador, they dance like Peris—or like Germans."

"I should prefer to dance with a Swede."

"Truly, here comes the pretty Mina de Welfen; invite her, and you will secure her happiness."

"I should like much better to insure my own Countess, it is with you that I should like to have the honor to waltz."

The orchestra was just finishing the prelude to the *Invitation* by Weber, which was then making a furore in Stockholm as well as in Paris. The countess got up, and without saying a word, put her hand in that of the count. Two couples passed them waltzing, and George and Christine followed them, and entered the vortex.

"I believe I have forgotten how," murmured the countess as she took the first steps.

"Have confidence," whispered George in her ear, and taking a firmer hold of her they whirled on.

Oh, waltz! poetry of motion! rhythm of harmonious movement! hymn of seduction, written in stanzas of graceful attitudes! Oh, waltz! charm and enchantment! Werther was right to curse thee, and the preachers are not wrong in prohibiting thee!

But Werther has saved nobody and every body does not heed the preachers.

George and Christine waltzed. Christine possessed a graceful and dignified manner which never forsook her. The waltz seems made to give occasion to

woman to display to their best advantage all those graces which, in repose, one merely suspects her to possess. The young man seemed to devour her with his eyes, and admire her elegant and supple figure which bent under his arm ; her hand a little long, but so delicate that it disappeared in his own ; those fine shoulders which the movement of the waltz sometimes confused with the shadows, and sometimes revealed, all quivering under the blazing light. However by degrees the piercing music, the brilliancy of the lights, the excitement of the waltz, the contact of the splendid form against his chest, the vague perfume exhaled from her hair ; all contributed to throw around the mind of the count a sensation which, for a long time, he had not felt.

Since they had been waltzing he had not exchanged a word with his partner. He wished to break the silence which was becoming embarrassing, and he now for the first time looked upon her face. The animation of the dance had in some sort transfigured it. A half smile lurked lightly upon her lips, like a bird that flutters without alighting ; her cheek naturally pale, wore a delicate carmine color, as if the rose of youth had blown upon it all at once. She knew he was looking at her, and raising her dark eyelids, she turned towards him her large eyes which seemed to be swimming in the divine joy of ecstasy. She was really above any common-place phrase more or less elegantly worded. [A vulgar compliment would have sounded like a false note in her ear.] George understood it and was silent. As he led her to a seat he said, "Weber is a great and noble genius, and no one, to my mind, has interpreted better the sentiments of the heart. His music is like the sighing of the soul."

"Is that the reason you cannot talk when they are playing it?"

"Yes," he replied, "it is precisely because it expresses so well what I feel, that I am restrained from interrupting it."

Christine resumed her seat.

"It is said," said she, "that the French speak a little lightly of serious things."

"I do not know," he replied; "it is a very long time since I have lived there."

Some friends of Christine were now approaching her, and George saluted her profoundly and reentered the dancing saloon.

"In truth, countess," said a gentleman of forty or more years, who came to take her hand at the moment when M. de Simaine took his leave of her; "I have never seen you look so beautiful as you do this evening. Your beauty is becoming alarming."

"For whom?"

"For me."

"It is so long that you have been uneasy."

"Alas!"

"You have no reason. I am no coquette, as you know very well."

"Unfortunately."

"Why?"

"Because, then you would have a fault."

"Baron, you are becoming very . . . Frenchy."

"Is this a compliment, or an epigram?"

"I do not make epigrams, and I do not like compliments."

"I make you no compliment when I tell you that you never were so handsome."

"Very well; so much the better!" said she, laughing.
"I wish to be." . . .

"Ah, countess, *he* has only just arrived!"

"Foolish man!" said Christine, hiding a furtive blush behind her fan.

"My poor friend!" replied the other, with a shade of melancholy, "you do not yet know how to lie."

"That will come by and by, perhaps," said she, laughing, but without looking at her interlocutor.
"Now will you be so kind as to order my sledge?"

"Do you know, my dear count," said the Chevalier Valborg, passing his arm through that of his friend; "that you make conquests rapidly?"

"I do not understand."

"Dissembler!"

"Giddy head!"

"It is three years, count, since she has waltzed."

"Behold a proof!"

"An evident one."

"If she has not danced, it is because she has not been invited."

"She refuses us."

"Then it is your fault."

"And a half hour *tête-à-tête*!"

"In a ball-room!"

"The favor was all the more precious!"

"Why did you not take part in it?"

"Where would have been my hospitality? I took care of that; besides, the countess would never have pardoned me; nor you either. But in truth, how do you like her?"

"She is charming."

"Adorable, my dear count, a diamond without spot!"

"No; rather a pearl, she has the sweetest glimmer of that."

"Be it so; but speak low; there she is!"

The countess was, in fact, just crossing the saloon on the arm of the gentleman who had called her sledge for her.

"Who is that with her?" inquired the count.

"It is Major Baron de Vendel; fifty years old, but with a warm heart; a little rough, but perfectly accomplished; he is a friend of the family."

"Ah!"

"Not as you understand it."

"A cousin, perhaps?"

"No; an aspirant, but with a good motive, as you say in France; a true hero of romance, however; a delicate and chivalrous soul. He would throw himself into the flames for the countess. He has just come from a campaign in the Duchies where he has earned glory, two wounds and a decoration, in fighting as a volunteer against Denmark."

The countess at this moment passed the two young men who were talking in the embrasure of a window. They bowed to her. The major saluted them haughtily; under his look, George quickly resumed his hauteur. But Christine's eyes rested on his, and he saw only her. She smiled sweetly on the Chevalier Valborg.

"There goes a smile," said the chevalier, "which has mistaken its address. All is going well, decidedly; you were born under a lucky star, my good fellow!"

"I do n't know anything about that," said George; "but I cannot get sentimental after midnight. Can one get supper in Stockholm? I should like to drink a bottle of French wine to the health of the Swedes."

"And of the *fair* Swedes!"

"That is understood."

"Nothing is easier. We have here our *Café de Paris*, called so, because it is kept by a German and frequented by the English. It is in the *rue de la Reine*, not far from the palace of the fair lady; for we have a palace, my dear count."

"Very, well chevalier; I invite you to supper."

"I accept."

"On the sole condition that we do n't speak of her."

"I shall be careful not to disobey you."

"*Andiamo!*"

The two young men descended gayly the principal stairway, covered with a carpet and planted with fir-trees on the branches of which hot-house flowers had been hung to give them the appearance of exotics.

"Wrap yourself up warmly," said Axel, as they passed out of the door; "it is an hour after midnight, we shall have bridges to cross, it is excessively cold outside, and my sledge is not covered."

"*Andiamo!*" repeated George, humming the delicious air which Mozart has put into the mouth of Zerlina and of Mazetto; and threw himself on the bottom of the low uncovered sledge, as the chevalier had truly called it.

The horses, noiseless as phantoms, drew the sledge along rapidly over the hardened snow. On each side of them the black houses seemed to be running swiftly by; and the moon, all white, was laughing through the gray clouds. A gust of cold wind notified our travelers that they were crossing the little river of Norrstrom and passing the baths of Rosen. They soon entered the long *rue de la Reine*. In about five

minutes the foaming horses stopped before the restaurant of Hans Bamberg, lighted up like daylight. The landlord was honored with the confidence of the fashionable world, and never closed his house on the nights of the balls. The two young men crossed—between two rows of resinous torches fixed on the walls in rings of iron—a little vestibule garnished with trees with green branches, and ascending the twenty steps of a wooden staircase, they found themselves at the doorway of the common saloon.

“Norra, give us a private room,” said Axel, taking a very pretty waiter girl by the chin, who came to wait upon them; “it is possible, I hope,” he added, tapping her familiarly on the cheeks.

“Everything is possible for the chevalier.”

“Even to preventing you from having lovers?”

“That is easiest of all!” said she, courtseying profoundly.

“I do not believe a word of that, you baggage! but no matter, that is your business, let us have supper!”

“What will you have, monsieur?”

“What have you?—oysters?”

“The chevalier must be joking? It is now three months since the oysters have been frozen up at the bottom of the sea.”

“That is true; well, give us whatever you have and some Champagne Cliquot! You see, my dear count, that you must come to Sweden to find the genuine French wines!”

“It is not yet iced, chevalier.”

“Well, my child, open the window and it soon will be.”
Norra went down to order the supper.

“Do you know, my dear Axel,” said George, taking

his seat, “that being served in this manner at table by beautiful girls, makes Sybarites of you ?”

“My dear count, we like girls in these places better than boys, which is your custom; nothing displeases us so much as man servants; women are better, their hands are lighter, they are quicker to perceive and to act, are more graceful and delicate. I am always tempted to laugh at your *valets de pied*, robust fellows, carrying in their arms a porcelain plate or a *verre mousseline*. And I tell you, that I like for a *coup d’œil*, to see these pretty creatures in short petticoats and colored waists passing and repassing before me; a little bonnet lying jauntily on the head,—a love of a bonnet, a strip of velvet and a bit of lace above the chignon—and a wide-awake eye ! Yes, I like these far better than your solemn looking lacqueys, buried in their cravats.” While Axel was talking he was interrupted by a knocking at the door.

It was Norra returning with another waiter who brought the wine and dishes. They seemed like a couple of elfs escaped from this wintry province of Bléking, in whom the red blood runs under the softest satin skin. In two minutes supper was served.

“Please, gentlemen, if you want anything more to knock twice on the glass, and *bon appetit*,” and the two waiters left the room.

Axel carved a wild fowl, something like a large pigeon, whose flesh was white and savory, the odor from which excited the appetite for both food and drink. George opened a bottle of wine, and filling the glasses, and handing one to his friend, said :

“To the health of our lady loves !”

“Wait awhile.”

“For what?”

“The second bottle.”

“Then let us dispatch the first.”

The supper was good, the spirits of both kinds flowed freely, and the young men were joyous companions. However, George spilled more than he drank, he was one who would rather be silent and listen. Axel on the contrary preferred to talk; he did not wait for the third glass in order to begin his confidences.

“Pardieu!” said he, “do you think I do not see through you? You dare not ask me, and are dying to have me understand. You need not button yourself up so, even to your chin, and carry about the air of the chancellerie; we are not here in Congress assembled.”

“I never ask questions.”

“But you always listen.”

“That is a little in my way of business.”

“And in that way you profit by the benefits of silence and the indiscretion of friends. Do you count as nothing the pleasure of talking?”

“Well, what would you like to know?”

“Whatever you are pleased to tell me.”

“Well, then, you must know that the countess—for it is of her that you wish me to speak, I imagine —”

“Yes, executioner; but why are you so fond of keeping me upon the coals?”

“At last, there is a cry from the heart! and it will cost you more than two bottles of Cliquot. Know then, that the countess is an angel —”

“Have a care, chevalier; you are falling into the beaten track!”

—“the countess is an angel, who was long ago coupled with a demon.”

"Her husband. I know it ; all histories begin so."

"Then I will abridge it. The Count de Rudden was a miserable lord, to say no worse of him, and he merited all the misfortunes which happened to him. In fact, after five or six years of this hell upon earth that they call ill-assorted marriages, the count died. It was the first act of politeness he had ever shown towards his wife. He left her young, rich and beautiful, and with a memory of past unhappiness which a great many would be very glad to help her to forget.

"The countess is frankness itself. She made no pretensions to a grief she did not feel. But she wore the deepest mourning and observed the customs of good society closely ; she quitted Stockholm, passed eighteen months in retirement on her estates, and then returned here and opened her saloons, which soon became the most agreeable in the city. M. de Rudden would have been astonished at the metamorphosis, but he had the good sense not to come back. However, his widow was sought in marriage by every one who had any claim to be ranked among her admirers, and even by others. One wanted her for her fortune, another for her beauty, a third for the support of family alliances, for she is of the family Oxen-Stjerna, and is connected with all that is powerful in the country. Christine accepts no one, she has never loved. But her repulsed lovers became in turn her most devoted friends. Can anything be said more to her praise or their's?"

"And you, chevalier ?"

"I, my dear count, without doubt, should have done as the rest have done, but I was in France when Mme. de Rudden returned to Stockholm, and on my

return I found her so strongly intrenched in her impregnable position of widowhood, that I resolved to begin where the others left off."

"And to finish where they began?"

"No; but to content myself with friendship, without passing over to love."

"That is, they say, the shortest and surest road. The beautiful widow could not have taken your discretion in good part. I know from my large experience."

"How old are you, my dear George?"

"Twenty-six years, *mon ami*."

Axel laughed.

—"But years in the country count double!" replied the count. "Yes," he continued, "women who defend themselves the best, like to be attacked, if it were only for the opportunity of defending themselves; they like to refuse; but they would not like it if they were not asked."

"This may be true in Paris; it is coquetting; and here we do not understand all these subtleties. You may be certain that you do not judge Mme. de Rudden fairly. She is entirely free from artifice. I have already said, she is simplicity itself. She is too good to be gratified at the spectacle of the unhappiness she has been the cause of, and is too much a stranger to all the calculations of vanity to draw after her a *cortège* of captive hearts. I repeat, you do not yet know her. Her nature is unlike that of any one else. The day when she loves, she is the woman to declare it frankly, and she will place her hand unhesitatingly in his whom she chooses. Oh, he will be a happy man, and I drink to his health!" continued the chevalier, clicking his glass against that of the count.

George had become very serious. He touched glasses but did not drink.

"And this major, this Baron de Vendel," he inquired, "who is he?"

"He is the countess's best friend; he has been passionately fond of her for ten years, or rather, he loves her. Oh, that is nothing, your eyes need not look so like firebrands. However, the choice of a man like the major could only be flattering to her; it justifies your preferences. The baron makes no boasts, does not hide his sentiments, and all the world respects them, they are thought to be so sincere. Christine is *sa dame*, as our fathers say, and our fathers said well. He has a chivalrous worship for her, like that of the cavaliers of the middle ages; he would die for her with his colors on his breast, thoughts of her in his heart, and her name on his lips. Cheer up, my dear count, one does not come across such an opportunity as this every day! Christine knows it, and makes no secret of it. But he is fifty years old, and every six months has to let out one buckle-hole in his belt. He has neither the age nor the figure with which he could sing "*Je suis Lindor*" under the window of his Rosina. However, the baron takes no airs upon himself, and thereby escapes the ridicule which is usually visited on antiquated lovers. He desires everything, does not hope, and asks nothing. He said to her, one day: 'You are to-day younger than I am, but in ten years we shall be more nearly of the same age.' This brave major reasons thus: 'I have no right to be impatient; I should have no excuse. I will wait as long as you please! always! if you wish it. Behold me, your slave, you know where I am; there I shall remain.'

You have only to make me a sign, and even this is useless ; I believe I should anticipate your wishes without that.'

"Let us be friends, then," replied Christine, "for I value no one more highly than I do you."

"And thus they live in the moonlight of friendship, which no cloud has ever obscured. It is said that Christine has promised that she will never marry again, or that she will never marry anyone but him. The major does not say so ; but it has been said in his presence, and he contented himself with responding with a deep sigh. You see, Monsieur ambassador, to what point we have reached, and it is very probable that all this will afford you food for thought."

"I think the marquise is a most charming woman, and that the major will some day be the happiest of husbands."

"I don't imagine that you believe the half you say ; but that is a great deal, and time will teach us the conclusion of this story. It is four o'clock ; I don't hear any noise ; the guests have all departed ; perhaps you would like to dream a little alone ; let us go."

Norra, who was sleeping on her post, on being awakened, presented them with their bill, and the two young men were the last to leave the fine establishment of Hans Bamberg. Axel left George at the door of his hotel on the *grand place du Stortorget*, the finest in Stockholm, and after having wished him golden dreams, pursued his way to his own home, humming an air of the opera.

CHAPTER III.

LOVE'S YOUNG DREAM—A CHANCE MEETING—LA MONTÉE DES LIONS—A DISAPPOINTMENT.

CHAMPAGNE wine, after a ball, has not the narcotic virtues of opium or hasheesh. George slept fitfully, and if he dreamed at all, he did so while he was yet half awake. The image of the fair Christine was always present to his half-closed eyes, passing and repassing before him; he was still listening to the prelude of the waltz of Weber ; he still held against his breast a beautiful, yielding and trembling figure ; he was still breathing the sweet perfume of mimosa, which was exhaling several hours before from her fan and her handkerchief, and his face was burning. Then all at once he experienced a sensation of cold, he thought he was on the Mælar with the endless snow-plain spread out before him : the black ponies, Christine in the sledge, passed him like the wind, and she extended her arms to him. He rushed towards her, and at the moment when he was about to reach her, the major's epaulettes barred his way.

The morning prolonged the agitations of the night ; his servant came and went through his chamber, making the fire, bringing the sugar, preparing the tea, and waiting for orders which were not forthcoming. The sun was as lazy as George this morning ; he forgot to rise ; at mid-day it was not yet daylight ; Stockholm was shrouded in a dense fog, and the count passed the

rest of the day in arranging his papers and in putting his office in order, and did not go out.

The day following, the weather was smiling, the sky blue, and every thing tempted him to go out. He called for the magnificent team and sledge which the Chevalier Valborg had tendered him, and went out on the road to Haga, the Saint Cloud of Sweden; which is the fashionable drive frequented by the best people. As he returned to the city it was just twilight, and he met another sledge going out. The frost on the windows of his sledge obscured his vision, and he only saw indistinctly a form half-buried on the cushions. He saw, however, that it was a woman; but nothing more. Arrived at the little church of Saint Clara, situated near the centre of the *rue de la Reine*, George gave the address of the countess to his coachman, who drove to her hotel and rang the bell. "Madam is not at home!" responded the *concierge*, an honest Dane who had been made a Swiss, and on whom on great occasions they buckled a halberd and a baldric.

George got out of his sledge and presented his card. "When the countess is at home for any one, she is at home for all!" replied the same official, with the majestic solemnity of an incorruptible guardian.

"To the chateau!" said the count, to his driver, brusquely.

The horses went off upon the gallop, and crossing *la place de Gustave-Adolphe et le pont du Nord*, stopped, covered with foam, at the foot of the *Montée des Lions*, a gigantic staircase to which the lions of Charles XII. seemed to forbid access. The sentinel and the driver exchanged a few words; then the sledge entered the grounds, traversed two courts and reached

the small terrace *des Lynx*, disposed in parterres and garnished with bouquets of trees. The Baron de Vendel was promenading there with the son of the minister of war. The major had a care-worn air; George avoided him and inquired for the Chevalier Valborg, and was told that just then he was busy in his own room. George wrote in pencil on his card; "I want you; come to me. They say you will be at liberty at eight o'clock; I shall be waiting for you from seven."

He then went to a reading-room; he found the newspapers dull, politics absurd, and the *feuilletons* annoying; and finally, not knowing what else to do, he dined, to kill the time, and returned home.

At ten minutes after eight he heard a ring at his door, which made him jump from his seat.

It was the chevalier.

"Axel, I thank you," said he, extending his hand; "I had great need to see you."

"I have no doubt of it; here I am!"

"Again I thank you."

"What do you know already?"

"Nothing. What is there new?"

"Have you seen the countess?"

"No."

"Have you called on her?"

"Yes; but was not received, and I am in a very bad humor."

"At what hour did you call there?"

"At four o'clock."

"She had already gone away."

"Gone away? Why, the major is still here."

"Count, you have no right to speak thus. It is a gratuitous injury which is not permitted to any one

with us. Some day you will repent using such language."

"Be it so! I repent it already; but pray tell me where has she gone?"

"To Upsala, to see her uncle, who is very ill. The news came at two o'clock; she went away at three."

"And . . . when does she return?"

"No one knows."

"Upsala, is it far from here?"

"Thirty or forty leagues."

"I can go there."

"Yes; if you wish to lose her."

"Axel, I begin to think I am in love."

"It is evident that you will adore her, especially if she should not return."

"My dear Valborg, you are too witty for me."

"Pshaw! do n't distress yourself; I will get you news from her."

CHAPTER IV.

ABSENCE — CORRESPONDENCE.

CHRISTINE did not return to Stockholm during the winter. I would not assert that the chevalier was right in saying that it was alone because of her absence, that George would come to adore the countess; but he certainly thought of her very often.

The Count de Simaine was young, he was not yet thirty years old; but he had already lived some seven or eight years in the fashionable world. He had known the best society in Europe, and had passed several

winters in the most celebrated capitals, more renowned for their elegance than for their morality. Elegant, distinguished, spiritual and discreet, he had never encountered many disappointments in his relations with women.

The facility of pleasure is one of the happy misfortunes of which one rarely grieves, but it often gives to our relations with others a sad levity, and to our sentiments a culpable inconstancy. The count made court to a lady as any one else would have said “good day” to her. He called this being polite, and he was too well educated not to be polite with every body. But these intrigues, engaged in from fancy and dissolved by caprice, did not bring him more than they cost ; pleasure is not even the small coin of happiness. Millions of centimes do not always make one piece of gold, it is all in the manner of counting. If Christine had remained in Stockholm, he, without doubt, would have been one of her most persistent admirers. He could have brought to the attack that French fury which is able to conquer other things beside provinces. Either Christine would have been vanquished, and the count, after the first moments of intoxication, would have realized the full price he had paid for his victory ; or by her resistance, the noble woman would have stirred up his irascible and sickly vanity, and in wounding his pride, his tenderness would have been destroyed. Absence regulated these matters better. It gave to Mme. de Rudden, already so enchanting, a new grace ; it gave her the only thing she wanted, the prestige of absence and the merit of the impossible. The women who leave it after them possess neither its beauty nor its charm, and the remembrance of it, still fresh in his

mind, diverted George. The first hours of solitude his youth had ever known were due to this cause; solitude which is the grave of small passions, is favorable to great ones. It gives to them that consciousness of self, without which one is not; it fortifies in purifying. There are, it is said, trees which draw their sap and their life only from the most remote strata of the soil; there are lives which throw out their flowers and fragrance only when their roots penetrate the heart to the sacred source of tears. The count had exchanged a look with Christine, some words, hardly a shake of the hands during the sympathetic motions of a waltz. After a week he worshiped her, at the end of a month he loved her!

And Christine? She had no confidant and no one ever knows what passes in the heart of a woman—even when they talk of it themselves. She corresponded with a few friends, for a long time whenever she was absent, she had been in the habit of writing to the Baron de Vendel, and she did now as she had always done before. People knew of it and they inquired of him for news of her, and they learned from him, that she had been called suddenly to the bedside of an uncle dangerously ill. After about a month Axel himself received a letter. It was the first time that Madame de Rudden had written to him. Axel was the count's friend. He ran at once to the count, entering his cabinet with the open letter in his hand.

"I cannot be deceived about this matter, my friend. The address alone on the envelope is for me, it is not to my own merit that I owe this amiable letter, and I now fulfil the intentions of the writer in handing it to you!"

"Does she speak of me?" inquired the count, taking the letter.

"You are more deeply in love than I had supposed. And the proprieties! Know then, that you are not even named and there is no postscript."

The count devoured the letter with his eyes.

"She has other correspondents than I," continued Axel; "but she knows that I am a friend of yours and she expects that you will see her letter."

"I forewarn you that I don't believe a word you say," said the count, reading.

"French and modesty," replied Axel, laughing.

The letter was short and artless. The countess announced the death of her uncle, and said she should remain several weeks yet with the widow and children; she added, that she regretted Stockholm and charged the chevalier to send her some books. This was nearly everything that was in it, not a word of the count, Madame de Rudden had not made a single allusion to him in her letter, but it was easy to see in the *ensemble* a shade of tender reverie, and expressions of half-veiled remembrances of friendship, which the gracious countess had never yet felt the need of expressing towards the chevalier.

"You will remark," said Axel, "that she writes in French."

"It is the language of the court, and is universal in the fashionable world."

"Yes, but never among ourselves, at least; but do not make me say more about it," and the chevalier took his leave.

The count passed the day reading and re-reading the letter. He studied the phrases and weighed the ex-

pressions in the endeavor to discover the thoughts hidden in the written word. It had been well considered and every word carefully measured. It is a quality which distinguishes a well-educated woman. The count might suspect a general intention running through it, if the chevalier told the truth, but there was nothing in particular from which he could draw any advantage. Without doubt, it was little for him, but for her was it not a great deal? The count obtained from the chevalier the privilege of preparing an answer, which the former must necessarily send to the countess. The first draft did not suit him, he perceived in reading it that this letter of a friend was rather that of a lover, that he had put a declaration in the mouth of the chevalier and that *his* burning passion was escaping through the cold pen of the chevalier. "That is too much," he said to himself, "and then if the countess should be deceived, if she should attribute sentiments to the chevalier which he is only expressing for me; there would be danger of misunderstandings — the case is delicate." He threw his rough draft into the fire and began anew and was better satisfied with his second effort. It was as nearly as possible as follows. He spoke of friendship, of remembrance . . . of the lively memories that the countess left everywhere, of the regrets which had followed her; and of the hopes which awaited her. So reserved as he was always in expression, led one to suspect a secret trouble. After a phrase sufficiently exciting, the count introduced his own name very shrewdly in saying that he had more than once asked for news of the countess, nothing more. Axel read the letter, approved of it, and felicitated himself on the rapid progress he made in the

French language. "It is not the French of Stockholm, it is the French of Paris," said he, "and I scarcely think that any one will perceive it; but I do n't believe any one can take offense at it." He copied the letter and sent it.

In about three weeks he received a second letter, shorter than the first. He carried it at once to his friend. The count found it like a breath of spring, hope beat his wings, and life ran and trembled in the lines written in haste, to ask for the dramas of Schiller and the La Saga of Frithiof. The countess spoke with visible emotion of the happiness of her return, anticipating the greatest pleasure from it, but named no period for it.

CHAPTER V.

CHATEAU DE SKOKLOSTER—A SURPRISE—A TÊTE-À-TÊTE—A DECLARATION—A PERFUMED HANDKERCHIEF—LEAVE-TAKING.

THE warm and balmy breezes of May were now felt upon the mountains; the sap was coursing its way through the unwithered branches of the trees which were making ready to resume their summer costume; the buds were opening; the leaves were unfolding and beginning to show the green, as they pushed their way out from the black and swollen branches; the moss with the heather was renewing its flowers on the granite rocks, and the noise of the waterfalls breaking their icy fetters sounded and resounded through the woods.

The Mælar, like its neighbor, Lake Clara, was free from ice; and the steamers had resumed their daily trips to the North. The aristocracy, who are not detained in Stockholm by the affairs of the Diet, or who have no charge at court, or who do not wait there the season of baths or of traveling, return at this time to their country seats.

The count was anxious to make some visits to families into which he had been received during the winter. Nothing was easier in Stockholm. The boat takes you away in the morning and returns at evening, after making the tour of the lake, penetrating its gulfs, touching at the islands, visiting the villages, and picking up and dropping its passengers by the way.

The count's first excursion led him to the Chateau de Skokloster, on the western border of Lake Clara. The illustrious family who inhabit this splendid domain stand at the head of the nobility of the realm, and it receives its visitors with that simplicity, that courtesy, and that grace, at once familiar and dignified, which distinguishes princely receptions and patriarchal hospitality. The count found at the chateau, only the old countess-dowager de Brahé. The family, which was composed of her daughter-in-law, a widow like herself, and of two young children, were out in the park with a friend who was visiting them. The count remained to dine. The chateau is curious for a stranger, and full of souvenirs of heroism and of love. Mme. de Brahé amused him with stories of the grand ladies of other days whom she had known, and whose manners and habits she knew how to describe. Time was passing rapidly and pleasantly, and the noble hostess was already in the second edition of the sentimental elegy

of the beautiful Ebba Brahé, who was the Berenice and the Marie Mancini of Gustavus Adolphus, when the count, looking accidentally out of the window, saw the two young children—brother and sister—come running through the grand walk of the park. Two ladies followed them—one was the Countess de Brahé, with whom the count had danced once or twice during the later fêtes of the winter; the other was turning at this moment towards the grand avenue of lindens and elms which traverses the park in its entire length, and he could not distinguish her face; but, from the elegance of her *tournure* and the superb *désinvolture* of her movement, the count was at no loss to know who was before him—in the figure he was gazing upon, he recognized the woman he so much loved. One of the children ran up to her, and pulling her by the dress, she turned around, and he saw the beautiful face again. His surprise was great—and, not less, his émotion. All the blood in his body seemed to have gone to his heart; and he fell, rather than seated himself, on a fauteuil. In order to recover his composure and gain a little time, he took up an album of designs, and began studying the picturesque costumes of Dalécarlie.

Very soon the folding-doors were opened, and the little ones ran to their grandmother, filling her lap with flowers.

“ My dear grandchildren !” said the old countess to the count, as she caressed these two blonde heads.

“ Charming !” murmured George, recovering himself.

The two women now entered the saloon.

“ What a beautiful picture !” said the Countess de Rudden, looking at the old lady and her grandchildren.

She had not yet perceived the count, who was half hid behind the high oaken back of a gothic fauteuil. "I too, grandmother, have brought you some flowers," she said, throwing herself on her knees, by the side of the children, at the feet of the old countess.

"Christine, Christine! what are you about?" said the other lady, laughing, and coming up to salute the count.

Christine turned, still on her knees, and recognized M. de Simaine. She remained a moment or two, without getting up, looking upon him with mute admiration.

"M. de Simaine, my dear countess," said the old lady, introducing them.

"I have already seen the gentleman," said Christine; and she blushed to the roots of her hair.

"What a fine group you make as you are now," said the young widow approaching them.

Many a painter, I am sure, would have been glad to reproduce on his canvas this beautiful scene so full of grace. The old grandmother with her white face, without wrinkles, all covered with violets, primroses, and anemones, was smiling upon her two grandchildren, who, half frightened, were crowding around her; Christine, still on her knees, turning towards the count, her bosom palpitating with her excitement, and the surprised expression of a deer who has been frightened in the woods. The country air had browned her skin; her eyes swam in a serene light, and the wind, which had been playing with her hair, had dislodged one of the large tresses which fell in golden ringlets on her bosom. She held on her shoulder, a branch of flowering hawthorn, inverted like the palm branches of the Vir-

gin and the saints which are turned towards the Madonna, in the pictures of Perugino. George stood motionless and mute, engraving these fine pictures on his mind.

But there are situations which it is not necessary to prolong. He made two steps towards Christine, and extended his hand to raise her ; he may have retained the beautiful hand a second too long, but no one perceived it. Christine still held on to the branch of flowering hawthorn which was standing erect between them, over-shadowing the two heads, and shaking upon them its white and perfumed clusters.

"The introduction is easily made, then. You are acquainted. I congratulate you both, and I am very happy to be the medium of bringing you together again. Count, I love Mme. de Rudden as I do my own daughter, and it is really *en famille* that you will pass the day."

The day was a short one for the count, but it was one of those we mark with a white stone in our souvenirs. The young man experienced an inexpressible pleasure at seeing Christine again. Never had she looked so beautiful to him ; she appeared a hundred times more so than when he saw her at the ball ; perhaps it was because he was alone, and in this cordial intimacy, that he could enjoy all the charm which her presence and society afforded him. The countess was dressed in black, and he thought that black was the distinguishing toilette *par excellence*, and the only one which was becoming to an elegant lady. Some violet-colored ribands which, tied in bows, she used to loop up her folds of black crape, relieved somewhat the sombre and severe black. On his side, he was over-

flowing with wit, animation and gayety. He had more flowers blooming in his soul than the children had gathered in the park, and if Christine had listened to her heart, she could have heard all the nightingales of the springtime of love singing there. She, too, was happy ; but her happiness was mixed with a secret trouble, a near neighbor to fear.

The steamer from Upsala would stop there after noon, and the count must return by it to Stockholm. Christine lived on the other side of the lake, which is here not very wide. From the window of the chateau they could see, at some distance away, her carriage coming down to wait for her at the little landing which had been constructed for the benefit of the two families. The Skokloster boat did not leave its moorings until after they had seen the horses on the other side of the lake.

It was arranged that the count should re-conduct Christine to her carriage, and that the boat should then wait for the steamer, which never waited for any one ; she stopped here a moment only to exchange mails, and sailed again immediately. The arrangement proposed was, therefore, the most natural thing in the world, and no one made any objection to it. But the old countess, who had missed once in her life getting on board the boat, was always afraid that her visitors might experience the same mishap. So, when the moment of departure was approaching, she thought more of hurrying her guests than of retaining them, of which the count found no reason to complain. As to Mme. de Rudden, she declared that she had no longer any wish of her own. She followed the impulsion given without having any idea of resistance ; the

others thought for her. She tied her ribands with a feverish movement. She embraced her friend's grandchild, and the little one cried :

" You hurt me !" and seemed astonished at the countess's abruptness.

" Put on your cloak, my dear," said the grandmother, thinking that it was with the cold that her friend was trembling. The count, with his hat in his hand, appeared superbly calm, but his impatience was devouring him ; he thought they were indefinitely prolonging their adieu, and that the thousand and one tender sentimentalities exchanged by the ladies in leave-taking were the occasion of a great loss of precious time for the men.

At last Christine took the hand he extended to her, and entered the boat.

" Adieu ! " — "*Au revoir !*" — " Write soon ! " All these exclamations were exploded at once, then the two chatelaines returned with the children, and three strokes of the oars drove the boat of the voyageurs into the open lake.

When George and Christine found themselves alone in this boat, with a single boatman, a Swede, who did not understand a word of French, the strangeness of their position struck them as singular ; they looked at each other, smiling at the idea of their meeting again under such peculiar circumstances.

They were seated near each other on a narrow seat, at the stern of the boat. The Lake Clara, which is connected with Lake Mælar, is not very wide at Skokloster, but its banks are low and the undulation charming. Here and there rocks of granite and porphyry, crowned with tufts of trembling firs, stand erect like

petrified giants ; two or three little islands, thrown up irregularly in the middle of the lake, break the monotony of the line, and vary the picture, to which the large, square mass of buildings of Skokloster, constructed with all the imposing heaviness of the seventeenth century, served as a magnificent background. The evening was splendid ; small, rosy clouds were coursing the sky, the beautiful sky of the North, so delicately blue, white silvered vapors, chased by a fresh breeze, rolled over the green and transparent lake, perforated with a thousand dimples, like the cheek of a laughing child.

Exterior circumstances exercise over us more influence than we are always aware of, and we ought not to reproach the romancer for describing them, because they often modify the sentiments of the personages of his story. In a *tête-à-tête* in the open air, and on the bosom of beautiful and free nature, one does not talk to a woman as one would in a saloon, by the fireside, or at the piano. It is the privilege of our spirit to exalt itself, and to aggrandise itself with the spectacles which surround us.

M. de Simaine and Mme. de Rudden experienced a moment of constraint, and that embarrassment which is not without its charms for a man and a woman, who find themselves alone together for the first time, under the empire of profound and tender emotions. With everything to talk about, they were dumb. The count enjoyed his own embarrassment, but more, still, that of Christine. He looked stealthily at his beautiful companion, who was allowing the end of her branch of flowering hawthorn to drop into the water. She attempted to gather her shawl up over her shoulders, and

as it rebelled under the direction of the wind, and was falling off, the count took the two ends and crossed them over her bosom, with all the delicacy of a young mother. Christine shivered with the cold ; the count took her hand, exclaiming :

“ How cold you are !”

“ Yes,” replied Christine, without raising her eyes, “ it was very warm in the house of the countess ; the air is clear and cold, and I am chilly. It will be nothing. The distance is very short.”

The count, without further parley, threw his cloak around Christine’s feet, with a manner far removed from the gallantry of the saloon, and as she attempted to throw it off and return it to him, he knelt and gathered it closely around her feet.

“ How do you feel now ?”

“ Much better, I thank you—and you ?”

“ Oh, I —— ”

He pronounced these two words in a tone which showed that he was very much excited. He did not rise from his knees. It is better, perhaps, to look upon a woman from this position ; she appears a thousand times more beautiful when she is handsome. She has, then, as she looks upon us, the expression of ravishing eyes which Raffaele always gives to his beautiful Madonnas.

An ineffable, profound and serene tenderness shone on the face of the count. He had extinguished the fire of passion in his eyes, which now had only the humid appearance of tears just ready to flow. Those black eyes attracted and retained her gaze, as if she had been fascinated by some magnetic charm. In her excitement, she grew pale, and her heart seemed to stop beating ;

but her lips trembled, and the shadow of her lowering eyelids palpitated on her cheek, like the wings of a bird.

"Pray get up," said she, in a low voice; and as he did not immediately obey her, she added, "let me beg of you to resume your seat."

"I am very well here;" he replied, but he finally got up.

They were silent again. Of what use were words to them?

"Will you not talk?" inquired Christine, finally. "One would think that you were afraid to awake the fishes in this lake."

"No," he replied, "I am silent because I do not wish to frighten away my dreams."

"You should wait then; for in order to dream, one must be alone." But the count was not disposed to talk.

"How beautiful that old manor is," said Christine, to break a silence which was becoming oppressive, pointing with her hand to the towers of the chateau de Brahé, all illuminated with the departing rays of the setting sun.

"Yes," said George, without looking at the picture, "and it is all the more beautiful now for me, because it is associated with my dearest souvenirs." A slight frown appeared on the brow of Christine; she did not like to have the conversation directed towards themselves, and he observed it.

"Pardon me," he said, "but I feel that this moment will, perhaps, be an unique one for me. Who knows if I shall ever find so favorable an occasion, and an hour so propitious? Who knows if I shall ever see you again?"

Christine made a gesture of naïf dismay. She looked

at him without saying anything, as if she were happy to hear him talk, and talk thus.

"Since I have found you, I have been so happy; and now I am soon to lose you. I have a secret here in my heart."

"Pray do not reveal it!"

A cloud passed over the count's eyes; and he appeared to feel a disappointment, and, Christine was fearful that she had wounded him; and she continued:

"Not now!"

"Ah," said the count, "you know it then, since it displeases you to hear it."

"Displeases me," she replied; "you do not believe that!"

"Oh, I thank you," he replied; "I thank you from the bottom of my heart. Others know how beautiful you are, but I alone comprehend how good you are."

"Do not make me repent of it then," said Christine, abandoning her hand to him.

George looked upon her with admiration, her face seemed to be transfigured, her cheeks were animated by a roseate hue, which seemed to be reflected from the rays of the aurora borealis of her own country; her eye was limpid as the water of the lake which they were crossing; her mouth gave expression to the rapid emotions of her heart, and one could see that her soul was blossoming with happiness like a flower under the genial rays of the sun.

George had an almost irresistible desire to throw himself at her feet, and to swear upon her lips all the oaths of love. She saw his anxiety, and to appease it, she placed her hand over his mouth, and pointed at the boatman who was bending over his oars and singing an

amorous ballad. His back was turned towards them, but he could easily look behind him.

George kissed the little hand which she was holding over his lips a thousand times; and in a low voice which appeared calm to her, he told the countess how his mind had been pre-occupied only with thoughts of her; he avowed to her that the first time he had encountered her upon Lake Mælar, he had judged her haughty and proud, and he had thought he could never love her, but when he met her at the ball, where every one was dazzled with her beauty, he himself was charmed, and felt that his life was henceforth to be bound up in hers. After she left Stockholm, he had sought her everywhere; he had had only one happy sensation, and that was on a certain day in the streets of Stockholm, where he had accidentally inhaled the perfume of mimosa, which she had about her at the ball.

“Which I have always about me,” she replied, taking out her pocket handkerchief.

He suddenly seized it, and with impetuous ardor, intoxicated himself with its exquisite fragrance. These perfumes, subtile spirits of things, pure emanations, breaths of the celestial world, penetrating charms, give an eternity to human relics, and, floating in the air, bring souls together and retain them by invisible bonds!

“In truth,” continued the count, “since the day I first loved you; for I do love you, Christine; I love you with the purity of the first passion of youth, with all that ardor with which a man’s nature is capable. Oh, how I have suffered! with no human heart to which I could open my own; obliged to bury the burning secret in my own breast, without being able to disclose it.

"And I," said she, carried away by his violence, "do you think then that I have spoken of it?"

And she never made any other avowal to him.

"I do n't know what the steamer is doing," said the boatman, turning to Christine.

"She will come soon," she replied; "be patient!"

They had arrived in the middle of the lake; Piers raised his oars, the little billows rocked the boat, which was now drifting gently. The boatman resumed, in a low tone, his ballad, of which the melody, slow and plaintive, but infinitely tender, agreed well with the words of a popular song of Dalécarlie, familiar to the boatmen of Lake Mælar, and of which the first stanza begins thus:

"Both in the boundless desert lost."

The count and countess listened to the song to its conclusion, and the count continued:

"I had arrived at a point where I no longer even dared to talk to you. To a woman all questions are indiscreet, and what woman is ever surrounded with more respect than she who is truly loved?"

Christine thanked him by a look.

"And then," he continued, "if you knew my inquietude! you, so beautiful; you ought to be adored; you, so tender—for you are tender, Christine—you ought to love."

"Mon Dieu!" she cried, "I never can."

"There is the steamer!" cried the boatman, resuming his oars.

A column of thick smoke was seen rising behind the firs and the larches on a little island which hid the steamer itself. Christine extended her ungloved hand to the young man.

"Is this your response?" said he.

"How exacting you are, already!"

"No," said he; "do not answer. I ask nothing. Whatever you please; here as always; know only, that I throw my life at your feet; my happiness is in your hands."

The steamer now hove in sight, and approached their boat rapidly, as if anxious to make up lost time she was going at full speed. The movement of her heavy wheels upon the water set their little bark to dancing upon the top of the waves, and Christine, who was standing, staggered. George extended his arm to sustain her, and she trembled at the warmth of his embrace.

"Christine! Christine!" said he, in a low voice, "I love you with all my heart."

She shut her eyes, and dropped upon the seat at the stern of the boat, while George, stepping upon the steamer, waved her an adieu with his hand.

The steamer shot ahead towards Stockholm, and the little boat pushed for the eastern shore of the lake. Running to the stern of the steamer, the count took out a pocket handkerchief and waving it, recognized again the delicious perfume of the mimosa, and looking at it more carefully, discovered in one corner the letter C, and the crown of pearls which all countesses wear on the forehead. It was the handkerchief of Christine, which he had involuntarily retained. He hid in his bosom this fresh relic of the love so dear and so sweet.

CHAPTER VI.

CORRESPONDENCE—LETTER FROM GEORGE DE SIMAINE TO HENRY DE PIENNES, AT MUNICH — CHRISTINE DE RUDDEN TO MAIA DE BJORN AT COPENHAGEN.

“ SHE loves me ! I tell you she loves me ! Illuminate the Pinacothèque in my honor this evening ! Who has been so foolish as to disparage Sweden, or insane enough to believe anything bad of it ? Sweden is a charming country and Stockholm is equal to Paris ! I acknowledge that it is cold here, but it is easy to keep warm ! and then the climate is healthy ; there are nowhere so many centenarians, one rarely dies here, and how they do live to be sure ! their winters are all gayety ; their carnival lasts six months ! And the spring ! you should see the North in the spring time ! It might be called an improvising of nature. To-day, nothing ; to-morrow, everything ! In the morning you may pass a naked rock, and in the evening the same rock will be covered with flowers !

“ You have too much sense to ask me whence comes this access of poetry, and why it is that I am babbling over with a hymn to the month of May ! I will tell you then, *I am in love !*

“ Yesterday I was very sad, yesterday morning at least ! It was such a long time since I had heard anything from her. I sometimes thought I should never see her again, and despair took possession of me—no, despair is too gentle a term, it was a profound hopelessness and discouragement full of bitterness.

“ Henry, we have known each other a great while,

you are my friend, my only friend ; you have been more than once a witness of the stormy vicissitudes of my life, you know what I can suffer, because you know of what passion my nature is capable. Passion is a great thing, no doubt, but tenderness is a greater. This woman of whom I have hardly spoken to you, that I have seen but twice, with whom I once waltzed ten minutes, I would not tell even you, but I do love her ! Perhaps I have not felt for her the same ardent desires, which more than once already have been kindled in me, but I have experienced, in simply thinking of her, a sadness mingled with I know not what of infinite sweetness, a charm which took complete possession of me. She left the city and I did n't know that she would ever return, and I could not even speak of her ; when one loves, one becomes discreet. There is great respect at the bottom of all earnest love. I was satisfied to suffer alone, and to you, my friend, I would not confess that I was suffering ! Sadness is more easily concealed than joy, and to-day, joy radiates from my eyes, laughter from my face, I am happy and I want you to be happy with me ! She loves me ! it is for me that the flowers are blooming ; it is for me that the birds are singing in the woods ; she loves me ! I am monarch of the world ! I have seen her again and she is more beautiful than ever, and more touching in her melancholy grace. I met her accidentally one day at the chateau Skokloster ; a blessed accident ! I cannot describe the day to you, a veritable enchantment from the first hour to the last. The happiest portion of all was a sail on the lake ! but I am no scribe and words are traitors, which never say what one wishes them to say. They should be set to the music of Bellini and

sung under her windows. This is a trifling matter however, it was a word exchanged in a low voice, under the eyes of a boatman ; it is true he was not looking at us, and it was only while we were crossing the lake ; how short the passage was ! With her I would have sailed for America in this frail boat. . . . With her ! . . . oh, my friend, how sweetly these two words sound in my ears ! Finally, her hand was rapidly pressed, hardly kissed—no, not even that ! —and that was all, and now these souvenirs will remain with me for life, however long that may be ! Ah, if you had only seen those large, blue, sombre eyes turned towards me—two violets looking at one ! Now, you know as much as I do, I asked nothing of her, and she promised me nothing ; the future is all mystery and I await it with a confidence which is not without anxiety. For you, my dear friend, behold how I make a confidant of you ! Pardon me, I will begin again.

“ When you write to Paris, tell V—— to send me a trunk full of all sorts of things. People do n’t dress here, they only bundle up, and I desire to represent my country worthily.”

The count rang for his domestic to take his letter to the embassy, for the courier was to depart the same day for Germany. When the domestic answered the bell he brought in another letter. The seal was not that of des Rudden, the three *merlettes en chef*, and the sword *en pal*, that he had seen on the carriage of the countess. This was a silver star on an azure ground, the rays illuminating a sea of sinople. He recognized it then as the arms of the family of Oxen-Stjerna. The countess, for the letter was from her, in writing to him had be-

come a young girl again, had dropped her conjugal coat of arms—des Rudden—by a delicate attention, and for this occasion used that of her own family. George looked a long time at the superscription as if he were reading there the future of his life, he finally broke the seal, and in a single *coup d'œil*, read these two lines :

“In three days I shall be in Stockholm, if you love me tell no one.”

No postage stamp stained the envelope, the letter had come by private hand. The count read it again and again, studying each word and each letter until the whole was, so to say, daguerreotyped on his brain ; he then opened a little ebony casket covered with cedar ; and taking out several letters, some faded flowers and ribands, which he threw into the fire, he deposited in their place the letter and the handkerchief of the countess. Bachelors who have sometimes been a little wild have necessarily among their furniture a desk with a secret drawer, a furnished apartment whose occupants receive more or less frequently their congé, according to the constancy, or the volatility of the proprietor.

“In three days !” said the count, taking the key out of the box. “The letter is not dated . . . it may have been written yesterday—it may be that she will arrive to-day, she may be here to-morrow ; yes, perhaps, to-morrow ! Ah, I would not have believed myself so young !”

He dressed himself and went to the club where he had not been seen for ten days. He crossed the billiard saloon to where the Chevalier Valborg made one of a crowd of half a dozen young men, among whom was

the Baron de Vendel. The chevalier coming up to the count, cried out: "Victory my friend, the beautiful countess is coming back! She has written to the major, see how radiant he is! But have a care, I think your stock is going down."

"To do that it must have first gone up. What leads you to suppose that I am in disgrace?"

"It is that she has said nothing to me about it."

"Women are fickle!"

"My God! yes, absence! Ah, absence, my dear count! but she will return, that is the important point; once on the ground again, you will regain your advantages."

"Do you think so?" said the count.

"With women, my friend, it is necessary to believe everything and nothing."

"A beautiful maxim! is it current in Sweden?"

"Yes; but we imported it from France."

CHRISTINE DE RUDDEN TO MAÏA DE BJORN, AT COPENHAGEN.

"*My dear Maïa:*—It is two months, is it not? since I have given you any sign of life; if I were to look for them, I should find plenty of excuses; a death in the family; annoyances and chagrins on all sides; the little rôle of a Sister of Charity, which I have played, in private, for the benefit of my aunt and my cousins, and then this, and then that. Finally, my dear, a thousand pretexts and a thousand excuses... if I only knew how to lie... but I do not... the honest truth is, that I have been very much embarrassed about what I have to tell you. There was something; but what; I did not know myself. I see I am whetting your curiosity, my dear, and I laugh at it. Now, come, ma-

dame ambassadress tell me what kind of men are French secretaries of legation at Copenhagen? There is one here, a certain George de Simaine, who is likely to run away with the heart of your friend. Ah, Maïa, how happy I am, to have so well guarded this poor heart, that it is not yet surrendered entirely to him. You are astonished, I see, and you ask what great fire has so readily thawed the ice of your friend's heart; and you are anxious for the details. The most astonishing of all, my dear, is, that there are none. My history is everything, and it is nothing! I have seen him twice, three times, perhaps, I am not sure; and it seems to me now, that I was created and placed in the world only for him.

“*Mon cœur, en le voyant a reconnu son maître!*”

“Do you see, this is French poetry I am quoting since I—I was going to say—since I fell in love; but it would be too soon, would it not? I read only French books. I did not wish to be ignorant of any thing which interests him. He is very handsome; still more, distinguished, and young! Ah, too young! that is his only fault and my only misfortune. He is twenty-six years old, and I! it is frightful, is it not? But what of it. It is not his fault; still less is it mine. What must be, will be. We need not cheapen our happiness! My happiness! well, yes, I used the word and will not recall it. I am happy since yesterday, and for the first time in my life! You know I met him at a ball at the house of Count F—. You, my dear, with your calm and serene mind, you do not believe in what our grandmothers called love at first sight. I do. The next day I quitted Stockholm; but I carried

away with me a souvenir! Long months passed; I was restless and sad; I thought myself forgotten; that is our fate; we poor women! we commit a greater mistake when we absent ourselves than the men do! At last, we met again at the house of the Countess de Brahé. We crossed the lake together; oh, I was very much moved and he was greatly affected. My dear Maïa, have you not told me twenty times that the discreet emotion of one who loves us, is the most tender and charming of homages to us? And if you had seen him when he took my hand! But for the sly boatman who was looking at us out of one corner of his eye, I could have fallen upon his neck. Do not scold me, my discreet friend; I have already scolded myself. But what could I do? I have lost a great deal of time. No one has ever loved me, or I have never loved any body; which comes to the same thing. You see that you must pardon me something. As to this man; I feel that I must love him and you know, Maïa, how I can love! I start to-morrow for Stockholm, with a heart full of joy, and a mind full of anxiety. I feel that my destiny is accomplished. It is in him! I don't know how it will end; perhaps I shall suffer . . . to suffer for him, will be happiness indeed!"

CHAPTER VII.

CHRISTINE RETURNS TO STOCKHOLM.

CHRISTINE returned to Stockholm on the day indicated. Her return was the occasion of a fête ; one would have thought that a young queen had newly arrived to the possession of her kingdom. Her friends adored her ; and she was invited everywhere. Her recent mourning prevented her accepting these invitations. Through her half-opened door she received her intimate friends ; and in the eyes of all the world, George held the first position in that category. The friends of the countess were frightened at it ; around a pretty woman, friendship will excite nearly as much jealousy as love. Prudence and the natural reserve of the young diplomatist, allayed the suspicions of some, and disarmed the mistrust of others. But nothing escaped the watchfulness of the Baron de Vendel ; it is lovers themselves only who are blind. Christine did not contain her happiness discreetly ; it escaped from her on all sides.

“How beautiful you are !” said the baron to her, one day ; “handsomer than ever ; *en verité*, you are transfigured !”

“Are you sorry for it ?”

“Yes.”

“Why ?”

“It is happiness which renders you so handsome ; and it is love which makes you so happy !”

“You meet again then your old idea ; that love is the disguise of women.”

“I like you better, however, when you do not wear it.”

CHAPTER VIII.

LIFE AT THE VILLA — BARON DE VENDEL — MORE CORRESPONDENCE.

STOCKHOLM, like Paris, like Vienna, like all other great cities, has its fashionable season. The Swedish beauties leave their capital when the swallows come ; some make the tour of the Continent, that is to say, they cross the Sund ; others content themselves with the baths of Guttenberg. They call that going to the South ! They understand each other. Most of them flee to their chateaux in the country, where, with no great expense of money, they can enjoy a quiet and pleasant life, served by their own people, in a certain sense their subjects, and in the midst of a thousand comforts which a prolific earth showers upon the proprietor who deigns to cultivate her.

But Christine, since the death of the Count de Rudden, had renounced this sort of life, which requires the superintendence of a man. She passed all her summers in the chateau of her uncle, who had just died, and to return there now would be to separate herself from George for five or six months, and she could not think of that. To take him with her to her own estate, which she had not visited in ten years, propriety forbade it. Christine, like all women who respect themselves, respected public opinion. But she was ingenuous—all women are when they are in love—and she found the means to reconcile everything.

There was, an hour only from Stockholm on the other side of the chateau de Haga, a delightful little

villa, belonging to an English *charges d'affaires*. From it there were magnificent views of the royal park, and of its beautiful trees, planted by Gustavus III. Two little streams, whose shores are embroidered with a beautiful lawn, cross the garden of the villa, and charming walks, leading in all directions, diversify the scene. One can enter by one route and retire by another. In a word, it was a *petite maison* of the country. Christine bought it, and established herself there, and announced to her friends that she would be "at home" every evening. The major presided at all the arrangements of the installation with a grace of manner which entirely veiled his sadness. It was he, with the Chevalier de Valborg, who went there with the countess on the day on which she took possession.

"It will be pleasant here," he said in her ear, as he gave her his hand to descend from the carriage.

"I hope," said she, "that it will always be pleasant for you here."

"The situation pleases me," said the chevalier; "and I hope to be often here with my friend Simaine."

"You will always be welcome," said Christine.

The baron, who observed the quick impressionability of her youth, blushed on hearing the name of his rival pronounced.

"For my part," said he to the countess, as they were entering one of the alleys in the park, "I hope he will not come here."

"And why not?" inquired she, with an air of surprise and seriousness."

"I should regret to see him here!" he replied, in a low tone.

"I should regret it if he did not come."

"Then my choice is not doubtful!" he replied, with the resignation of a martyr, who smiles at his executioner.

"Very well. Now you are reasonable; and it is in that mood that you please me," said Christine, leading him to the basin of gray and blue porphyry, where the chevalier amused himself throwing bread-crumbs to the gold fishes. Christine possessed all the delicacy of a truly noble heart, but she was in love! and in the intoxication of her first love, she did not even perceive that she was bruising a noble affection, and that she was unmindful of the major's profound tenderness for her. The presence of the major added little to her happiness, and for this little he paid with the sacrifice of his repose. It is a sufficiently rough experience to see one's love slighted; what is it then when to this first torture a second is added; that of seeing your rival preferred! But the woman who is ruled by her passion is a little like the priests of the Orient, who march up to the wooden images of their god, trampling upon the living bodies of their devotees and slaves.

The major entered resolutely upon this path, strewed with the thorns of hidden sacrifice, and of unknown heroism. It was only at a later day that Christine comprehended the grandeur and merit of this abnegation. Perhaps it might be said that this was also, in some degree, the baron's fault. He had given expression to his love maladroitly; never had he spoken of it, except when she had been listening to another. He had thus chosen his time unfortunately. Quietly and by degrees he had habituated himself to the rôle of the preferred friend, and so long as no one came forward to play a more brilliant part, and to supersede

him, he was contented. The count's presence turned everything topsy-turvy, awoke him from his dreams, and interrupted his long nourished hopes. Nothing, however, betrayed the state of his feelings to the world ; he had occasional paroxysms of nervous irritation, which he promptly suppressed, but that was all.

"Little as I am to her," he said to himself, "I will at least be that ! Have I not sworn a hundred times to her to obey even her slightest caprice ! Perhaps I should suffer still more in not seeing her at all. But that is not the question ; she wishes matters between us to remain as they are. Let them, I am resigned !"

Life at the cottage soon became very charming to all its habituées. Axel, the major and the count were the only regular visitors. The drama was confined to these four characters. Christine was fast losing her serenity, the major was unmoved ; Axel was a looker-on ; and he saw more, perhaps, than one would have expected one of his mobile and frivolous nature to see. Soon, however, the major, whose name was on the active list of the army, received an order to accompany his general on a tour of inspection. Christine saw him depart with an emotion, mingled with secret pleasure ; she was, unknown to herself, so charming to him, that he comprehended all the pleasure she would derive from his absence. Love which has not yet suffered has sometimes this naïvety of egotism ; his excuse was that he had not perceived it.

After the major left, Axel went less frequently to the villa ; the count, on the contrary, went there all the oftener. The more he saw of Christine, the more he loved her, and their mutual attachment became stronger and stronger. Neither of them sounded

the depth of their love ; never was happiness more perfect than theirs. Christine sometimes had some vague anxieties ; but she hid them from George, and oftener, still, from herself. He saw only smiles on her lips, and every shadow of pain was driven away with a caress. It is thus that lovers console themselves, never knowing which loves the most ; but neither one nor the other could have loved more. They were together always. The count, after the business of the day was dispatched, repaired forthwith to the villa, sometimes in a carriage by the road frequented by everybody, and sometimes on horseback across the fields. If from any cause he remained at the villa the whole day, he was careful to show himself everywhere, and to make a noise about it for a week. It was, however, a useless precaution ; people took no thought of them. Stockholm is not so much a *petite ville* as some of the saloons of Paris.

People relate the catastrophes and the revolutions of a life that is checkered by unhappiness. Authors write books describing the events and accidents of thwarted loves, but happiness has no historian.

The summer ran away like a day without clouds. It was, for our lovers, one of those blessed seasons which never come to us twice in a lifetime. The count felt it, and enjoyed it with a sort of avidity a little intense which sometimes troubled Christine. She, on the contrary, accepted happiness with an acknowledgment which astonished her. She did not believe it was in store for her, and it surprised, as much as it charmed her. Her mind had brooded over the impressions of the griefs of her early youth ; and, notwithstanding all

the affection with which she had been surrounded since, it had remained as a sort of defiance against herself. It is often thus with the most sensitive natures, exposed to the severe chastisements of life. (She coiled them up upon each other invincibly, and, when later in life a tender sympathy came to her to upraise them and to create for them a new life, long and patient efforts were necessary to inspire them with that confidence which is, to happiness, the guage of its duration.) Severe moral sufferings of early life embitter and corrupt vulgar minds, who revenge themselves, sooner or later, on those who surround them—they have suffered, and they claim the right to make others suffer ; but, generous minds must, on the contrary, render good for evil, they seek to make others happy, and are only unsuccessful when they try to do themselves the same service. (There are flowers which yield their perfume only when they are bruised ; but, when it is once yielded up, they never flower again.)

Christine had preserved all the freshness and the tenderness of her youth. She had lost only the confidence which usually accompanies it, and she had become more agreeable to others in becoming less so to herself. No love better than that of George's was capable of pacifying her fears and giving her the only thing she needed—the just appreciation of herself. But, here again, the excess of her delicacy led her astray. She felt that she was loved more than she had hoped to be ; as much as she could desire to be—but, always ingenious in tormenting even her joys, she asked herself if there was not mingled with it, too much of kindness on the part of M. de Simaine ; if he did not love her too much for herself, and not enough for himself. To be entirely

happy, she would have wished him to be more egotistical ; a noble and charming error of an adorable nature, who was always fearing to receive too much and not to give enough, and whose supreme happiness consisted in making others happy.

The count, who was only a man, suspected the existence of these refinements rather than comprehended them. He had his presentiments and anxieties, as will be seen by the following letter which he wrote to his friend on one of the early days of autumn :

THE COUNT TO HENRI :

“ You have not replied to me since I wrote you last. I do not complain ; I have passed an enchanting season. It is an experience of life aside from my ordinary one. This woman I do not know how to praise her too much, nor how to love her enough. She has introduced me into a new world of tenderness and of love. Love with her resembles nothing with which we are acquainted ; and, when I tell her that I love for the first time, and that until I knew her I have never loved, it seems to me that I am telling the truth. With her, every thing is tenderness and passion, with a freshness—if I dared to say so—a first flower of youth, which seems to blossom, or rather to bloom only for me. I do n’t know how it has been preserved for me thus ; it is, doubtless, an affair of the climate, which has all the effect of a Parisian winter. I swear to you that she is perfect. And then she is so beautiful ! You know that it is a weakness with me to admire beauty. There are men who pretend to be indifferent to it ; who insist that, after a week, there is no difference between one woman and another. It is doubtless a paradox invented by some

victim of the errors of nature; but, it has never convinced me. I think, on the contrary, that it is precisely when the calm succeeds to the first transports of happiness, that it is sweet to arrest one's view on the pure lines and the gracious contours of a loved face, which still charms us in repose. This is what I find in Christine. Nothing with her disturbs the harmonious accord between the woman of one's imagination, and the woman one sees before him. Never was a more noble soul revealed under more noble traits.

"Behold here the reason why I love her so dearly, with so complete a detachment from every thing that is not herself. You know, my friend, that I have always looked for perfection—as if I was worthy of it! One thing alone afflicts me; not for myself—my egotism rejoices at it—but for her, and that is, her unconquerable mistrust—this fear of never doing enough when she has already done too much. This dreamy and vague inquietude which one meets so rarely among our own women, and which seems to be at the foundation of her soul, she sometimes forgets—but she always comes back to it. When I renew my oaths of love at her feet, I feel that she believes them while she is listening to them, and I suspect that she doubts them when she no longer hears them. Her adieus have something heartrending about them: when we are about to separate only for four and twenty hours, you would think we were parting for ever!"

"One day, I overheard her mourning as she was looking at me—'Oh, if I were only young!' This word frightened me. Does two or three years—five or six at most, that she is older than I am—frighten her so much? Dear creature! I made as if I had not understood her;

consolations are sometimes maladroit ; they lead people to believe that they need them, and with a nature so fine, that it comprehends too much, so delicate that the least thing wounds it ; every step becomes dangerous. When I perceive that these sad notions come over her, I take the best means to divert her attention from them. I pretend that her age is an artifice of her coquetry ; that a woman has no other evidence of the date of her birth, than that which she wears on her face ; that she is twenty years old in the morning, and eighteen in the evening ; and, I swear to you, Henri, that this is the truth. Never did nature do more for a woman. The ices of the North have, without doubt, preserved in her a purity of blood, and years have brought her every thing, and have taken away nothing.

"I can not, however, explain all this to her ; she already reproaches me with examining her too closely—although she does not hesitate to do the same thing herself. However that may be, Henri, you must love her without knowing her ; love her because she makes me happy ; very happy—in truth. I feel each day that my debt of gratitude to her is increasing for this happiness which she brings to me. She need not know this, however, for she asserts that she only loves ingrates ; that she never does anything except for herself ; and, that she will cease to love me the eve of the day on which I shall owe her any good will for anything. She is not, you see, like other women, and that is doubtless the reason why I love her. No one else would have been able to give me what I have received from her—life of the heart and life of the soul. In her I find a force and a direction. She inspires me without appearing to mistrust it ; what she wishes ought always to be.

" You know I am rude in council ; but women, more than men, have light and strong hands, and I believe in truth, that they alone can lead certain men, as they alone, they say, can lead certain horses. Since I have known her, I feel that my life is better ; I am in a world of loftier ideas. It is all there, my friend ; everything is in the woman one loves ; otherwise there is nothing. Christine is no blue-stocking, a silly species of woman whom I could never endure ; but she knows perfectly the literature of her own country, and understands that of ours ; she explains to me what I do n't know, and asks when she is ignorant ; and our hours pass rapidly, and charmingly away. We work like two children, pupil and teacher, each one in turn.

" Would you like an instance ?

" You know that I adore music, and that I cannot endure the piano ; one day I had been detained in Stockholm all the day, and I came to see her very late ; as I approached, I saw that the saloon was lighted up. We ordinarily remain in the little boudoir . . . this word is not well chosen, for it is not a boudoir, as you understand it, and you will not find there any of those frivolities, more or less costly, with which frivolous women are apt to surround themselves. It is a sort of cabinet, between her saloon and her bed-chamber, where she has her books, some pictures, and a little portrait of me, taken when I was twelve years old, which she has copied in pastel, with a great deal of skill. She never receives strangers there, and it is a sanctuary for us ; sacred as the bed-chamber of an English woman.

" 'A visitor,' I said to myself, seeing the illumination, and as it pleased me best to be alone, I was a little annoyed at it. Approaching, I heard the sweet and sub-

dued strains of one of those newly-invented organs which carry music into every household. I inquired of the valet, who was with the countess.

“‘No one,’ he replied; ‘madame is alone.’

“I went in. Christine was seated before the organ; she was playing some Swedish melodies and accompanying them in a low voice. I entered the room without making a noise, and listened.

“After preluding a little, as if she were making the acquaintance of the peculiarities of the instrument, she stopped a moment, and placed her head in her hand, as if to recover her souvenirs or her thoughts, then striking two or three chords, she sung, with great sweetness and a profound charm, the popular song, beginning:

‘Both in the boundless desert lost,’

which we had heard when we were crossing the lake together, and when we spoke of love for the first time. I did not allow her to finish it, but ran up to her, exclaiming, ‘Thanks, my dear friend, thanks.’ She received me with great cordiality; with open hands and smiles on her lips.

“I wanted to give you this surprise,’ said she; ‘but would you believe that there was not an organ in Stockholm? I had to send for this to Hamburg. That is the reason you have not heard it before.’ What could I answer to this, Henri? I took her hand and covered it with kisses, and insisted on her resuming her music.

“Her voice, without being powerful—and I like it the better thus—is of a pure tone, and has the ring of silver. As to expression, it is a soul singing; when I listen to her, ecstasy takes possession of me; music opens its white wings, and bears us away! Never did

Christine seem so beautiful to me as on this evening ; her face shone with a radiance which the painters give to the portrait of *Sainte Cecile de la Légende dorée*, it is the same, swelling with ecstasy, the same face, a little drawn down, and when one knows how to read it, one finds it radiant with reverie and passion ; her thin hands and her fine fingers rapidly running over the keys, caressing the instrument, rather than touching it, awake the sleeping notes which, rising at her call, mount in the air, like the flight of melodious birds when one opens the cage.

“ As she finished her song, two large tears, which trembled an instant on her eye-lashes, fell upon her cheek. I was profoundly moved.

“ ‘ Christine,’ I said, ‘ you should not play thus ; it is not well for you.’

“ ‘ Have I contributed to your pleasure ?’ she replied, with an adorable smile.

“ She is a perfect being, my friend ; she has the same devotion in little things as in great ones ; the same forgetfulness of self, and the same pre-occupation of others. You see, now, Henri, what Mme. de Rudden is like, and you can judge whether I ought to attach myself to her. I do not know yet how we shall arrange our future, but what I do know is, that nothing can ever separate us, one from the other.”

HENRY DE PIENNES TO GEORGE DE SIMAINE :

“ You hold your happiness in your hand ; do not open it. Happiness takes to itself wings and flies away ; it is a bird which never lights twice on the same branch. Proclaim the banns ! I am about to demand leave of absence, and would like to be the first to salute the

Countess de Simaine. I would write you a longer letter, but you are in no frame of mind to read long letters, and I want to profit by the occasion of a certain M. Borgiloff, going to Stockholm, to send this. I knew him very well in Italy; he arrives now from Florence, and goes to Stockholm to join the Russian legation. The letter will probably be taken charge of by Mlle. Nadèje, his daughter, a brunette with blue eyes, who has turned the heads of all the young men here. At the last ball, the gallant King Louis took notice only of her. The sweet Lola Montez was so much annoyed that she broke three horsewhips the next day."

CHRISTINE TO MAÏA DE BJORN.

"*He* has been detained all the morning at the embassy, and he dines to-night with the ambassador. If I had not gone myself to Stockholm, where we met by accident, (you understand these accidents?) I should not have seen him to-day. However, I did see him, and the day is not entirely lost. My time has been so much occupied that I have not had, for two whole months, a minute to write to you, my best, my only friend. I have not had time, in fact, to do anything. Nothing fills up one's life like happiness. When *he* is here, it is him: and when he is not here, it is still him! You see it is *him* always. The dear tyrant has taken me by storm, and how he has taken me to be sure!"

"I inhabit a veritable terrestrial paradise, laid out by an Englishman, who did not think it worthy of him, and he sold it. I have not yet encountered the serpent, and I am not the woman to listen to him if I should. Eve was only sixteen years old; it was on that account that poor Adam was lost! Mine has nothing to fear,

M. de Simaine is the best of men. I don't know whether love has blinded me, but he seems to me to be perfection itself; it humiliates me, and I think sometimes that I could wish him less good. He is the tenderest, the most ardent of men; and above all, so true! It might very well happen that he would not love me, but he never could deceive me; he is as incapable of that as he would be of a cowardice. Not to love me! Ah, my dear, this thought alone is for me, in the midst of my happiness, like the little black speck in the sky on a perfectly clear day, which, to the sailor indicates a tempest. When the thought comes to me I chase it away; if it returns, and I give myself up to it, my reason wanders, my blood boils in my veins, beats in my temples, and takes complete possession of me, and I become wild. Not to love me! Could such a thing be? Have I not bound him to me by all the ties known to tenderness and to love? Now it is that I rejoice that I have not always been happy. I thank those who caused me to suffer. It is said that we must pay for our happiness sooner or later; have I not paid for mine in advance? For two days George has been in most charming humor with some unusual happiness blooming on his face. If you only knew how becoming the expression of joy is on his face! It was one of those blessed hours in which confidence is absolute, and in which each one can read the thoughts of the other. I asked him his age, which he has always hid from me, and he told me that he was only twenty-six years old. I am thirty-four! Do you comprehend the difference, Maïa, between these two numbers? To-day it is nothing, and no one sees the difference. Neither one of us has any particular age. I am the younger; he the elder; we are, both of us,

twenty-eight years old, but soon he will be thirty and I forty. Can any one love a woman who is forty years old? It is painful to me to think of that. George, if he thinks of it, dissimulates well; but I believe that he does not think of it. I know his thoughts as he knows mine.

“Yesterday we had a solemn interview.

“‘Countess,’ said he, as he entered, ‘will you excuse me if I present myself before you in a black cravat and in a frock coat?’

“‘My dear George, it seems to me that it is your custom when we are alone.’

“‘Yes,’ he replied; ‘but to-day I am about to do a thing a little out of the common way.’

“‘Speak rapidly; you frighten me.’

“‘Already, countess?’

“I swear to you, Maïa, that I did not know what he was going to say to me. I was far from suspecting.

“‘Well, what is it?’ I demanded, a little troubled in spite of myself; ‘you make me afraid with your mysterious airs.’

“And as I was withdrawing my hand, which he was still holding in his:

“‘I am come,’ he said, ‘to demand this hand for all time; this little hand that you are already striving to withdraw from me.’

“I was overcome with emotion which prevented me from answering. He thought that I was disposed to hesitate; he said nothing, but turned pale and I felt his hand tremble in mine. Oh, Maïa, how happy I was to know that I was thus loved!

“‘George,’ I said to him, ‘I love you. You know

that I love you ! But your demand is so sudden ! I did not think—you will not exact —— ’

“ ‘ I exact nothing, Christine,’ he replied in a sad tone.

“ ‘ My friend,’ I said, ‘ I am ready to do all that you desire. I wish for everything that you would wish for. You shall never suffer either for me, or by me, George ; but in your turn be good and give me a week to reflect upon it, I ask it as well for you as for myself.’

“ He consented and I sat down to the organ, I could not talk any more. I played the airs that he loves. I suppose I played well, for when I looked up at him, I saw big tears in his eyes. But my dear Maïa, I had no need of a week. Pshaw ! I was already determined. I shall never be Countess de Simaine ! He wishes it, that is enough for me. Oh, do not be deceived, I write this confession with profound grief. It is my best hope of happiness in this world, that I renounce, I know, but I feel that it is necessary for him ! He will never know the price of the sacrifice. But you, Maïa, you will comprehend and you will pity me. To be the wife of a man that one loves, to be with him, through life and through death, always !— always, this great world of human eternity ; to go with him hand in hand, under the eyes of men, under the eye of God, with the favor of all, to have nothing more to fear, neither sadness nor white hairs, nor isolation of the last days, but to grow old together gracefully, in the midst of dear children who love you, and make your lives happy in rejuvenating you with their youth ! Is not here to be found the greatest happiness which can be showered upon a woman ? and do you not know that at the bottom of the heart, so soon as we

love, that this is all the happiness that we desire? Do you believe that anything, even in the happiest *liaisons*, could ever supply this? And this happiness which is offered to me I refuse. I refuse it on his account. I have no desire to lead him to a position which he will ever repent of. I would not profit by the impulses of his generous heart, I would not like to be ten years hence the wife of a young husband; I would not forge the fetters which would bind him, and which he could not break when he may feel their weight. I know that I am sacrificing myself, but is not sacrifice under one form or another a virtue in woman? And then, if I must tell you, in sacrificing myself for him, I experience, I know not what bitter happiness and dolorous contentment. I love him dearly, for there is no egotism in my love. I promise myself to render him happy, and I would keep my word, come what may come! I believe that he will love me a great while yet, and there are moments when I am afraid that he may not!

"I know nothing of his past, and you know very well, that this absolute ignorance is sometimes a cruel torture! No, I know nothing of him; but it seems to me that his nature, so delicate, ought to be terribly variable. No one, I think is more capable of being rapidly and furiously excited; but can he maintain the same emotion long? This facility of impression which renders him so enchanting, does it not render him at the same time incapable of constancy, and is not the danger with him all on the side of the charm? What frightens me often about him is his ready appreciation of beauty, which predisposes him to enthusiasm for all who realize the ideal of his eyes—but who ought so

readily to turn him away from it when disillusion comes. Would you believe that it is from the most exquisite and the most tender of his homages that I suffer most; because I am persuaded that he will love me no longer, so soon as I merit them less? Do not say that I am too subtle, if you knew what one becomes when one's whole heart and soul are turned towards a single and unique thought! In your wise and calm happiness, you may find these follies and these terms perhaps, chimerical, but when one loves, as I love, one must always have an unquiet heart. Those who do not fear, do not love.

“Adieu, Maïa, do not preserve this letter, it is a little sad. It rains and I am cold. To-morrow he will come again and with him all my joy. To-morrow the sky will be blue, the breeze tepid, and my soul in peace. Again, adieu, preserve your friendship for me, always the same, let there be in it no yesterday, no to-morrow.”

MADAME DE BJORN TO CHRISTINE :

“I grieve for you and I admire you, you make me envious of you and you make me afraid. I know nothing of these grand sentiments. Do not write me any more similar letters. Since reading that, I have lived only in trembling. I feel that you are capable of such a love as you describe, but I do n't know if there be a man in the world who merits it. I love my dear baron very much, but I am calmer and so is he, and we are not any more unhappy for it. Although I have not your imagination, I doubt whether you have many pleasant hours. But this life is a dream; have a care of the waking. Were I in your place I should accept the offer. You will be handsome a long time;

that belongs to your family. M. de Bjorn who adores you, told me that your mother was youthful and gay at fifty. Marriage has its good side, and if nothing be perfect in this world, it is perhaps the best thing among the bad ones. I am not preaching to you, although I am somewhat of a Puritan, I preach only to myself. But in the point of view even of happiness, marriage is still the most certain of the guarantees. An inconstant is often restrained by the sweet voice of a little angel crying to him, "papa!" He stops at the threshold, looks around, sees the mother who smiles—and remains at home. If he goes, he returns soon. But the others! once gone, one sees them no more! They are the birds of passage which sing on the branches, stealing the fruit and flying away with it! Think of all this again!

"Loved as you are you will be punished, your happiness will pass you by. Your happiness! In securing it do you not also secure his? Here is a man to be pitied because the most amiable woman in Sweden is a few years older than he; that is to say, has more soul, more devotion, more true tenderness, for it is only at our age, that one knows how to love, my dear; at twenty a woman loves love, at thirty she loves the lover and the husband; above all when she has the happiness to realize that the two make but one!

"And the poor major! he has a good heart, Christine, but I am not eloquent enough to plead lost causes! there is one who loves you! It is you who have had him sent off on this mission! It was not a bad idea. It is very well for a woman to be cousin to the minister!

"If your protection could only send us to Paris! I carry Copenhagen on my shoulders. Adieu. My

friendship attends you. Endeavor not to have need of it. It is capital, the interest of which you do not touch. Pardon me this financial comparison, they have been talking money around me the whole evening. It is the malady of the day, and I believe it is contagious."

CHAPTER IX.

CHRISTINE — LOVE IN A COTTAGE.

THE summer first and then the autumn ran away in the enjoyment of a happiness without alloy for the lovers. Have those whose lives are only seasons of happiness any right to complain? They lived, one for the other. Christine arrayed herself for George; this was her morning occupation; she knew the head-dress he preferred, and the costume which pleased him most. Above all she found in this, constant pre-occupation of her thoughts with him, which is for lovers like sweet flattery to the heart; it is by such signs that we recognize love. When one loves less than this, one does not love at all. Four years beyond the thirtieth had passed over Christine's head, like the centuries over the eternal marble of those statues, whose beauty they render only more brilliant and more perfect still. Sometimes in the morning an almost imperceptible wrinkle appeared around her eye; sometimes it would be in the blue net-work of the veins which ran over her white forehead, leading one to suppose that the delicate blade of a razor had just passed over it, that was all. And when, like the venus-aphrodite, she stepped

out from her cold bath, shaking the liquid pearls from her disheveled hair, it was the springtime of her beauty. She had taken great care of her hair for fifteen years, and it was now so thick that it seemed brown, although it was really blonde, so deeply was the golden, browned into the great mass; but this gold, which was merged into bronze, did not cease to be golden; this was seen when her head, reclining on the back of the gothic fauteuil, received the rays of the sun which fell upon it, penetrating it and making it radiant around her forehead, like an aureole of brilliant light. Her mouth, when she smiled, had the freshness of an infant's, and made one think of a budding flower. When a young girl, Christine thought little of her beauty; I could easily imagine that she was ignorant of it herself. Now, however, she knew that she was handsome; was proud of it, and it made her happy. Emotion especially, transfigured her, her soul shone through all the features of her face, animating them. She was easily excited, and a sort of interior light illuminated her face, like those beautiful vases of fine sculptures which are lighted up entirely from within. Her eye, a little drawn down, like an unfolded peach leaf, so calm and so sweet in repose, threw off its magnetic effluvia, and passion breathed in its smile. Then it exhaled from her like a charm, to which it was necessary to submit. But it was one which might surprise you often, and which you might see always. She had nothing to hide; because she was all truth, noble and grand, and it was one particular character of her beauty, that in looking upon her, one felt oneself to be better. The count, in taking her by the hand, entered with her into a world of whose existence he had no

suspicion ; that mystical world of the northern races, in which the women know how to purify love by elevating it. She opened to him unknown horizons, and so extensive, that his eye could not penetrate their depth. Never were two lovers in more perfect *rappor*t with each other ; this accord was so complete, that even when they were separated, by a sort of mysterious union, of which the bond was never broken, they each felt every *contre-coup* which affected the other, notwithstanding the distance which separated them.

CHAPTER X.

LAST DAY AT THE VILLA — A PARTING — RETURN OF THE
MAJOR — LIFE AT STOCKHOLM.

AGAIN Sweden was shivering under its mantle of snow, and the city became the great point of attraction. The chateaux were depopulated, the people abandoned their parks, the cottages were given up to solitude, and in the villas which strewed the borders of the lakes, the sounds of “ revelry by night ” were hushed for the season. Christine returned to the city later than the others ; she came finally, but not without regret.

The count went to spend the last day in the country with her. It had snowed all night. The paths through which they were in the habit of walking in their daily promenades were filled with snow. The basin of the fountain was frozen over ; the fir-trees shook their frost-powdered heads with a melancholy air, and the frightened birds hopped from branch to

branch, filling the atmosphere with their frightened cries. George and Christine breakfasted together. Towards midday the sun showed his pale face between two clouds. They went out for a moment to take a last look at the park, the woods, the garden, and all the dear places where they had spent so many happy days. But the cold was intense ; Christine could not bear it, and they returned to the house, to gather up the souvenirs of their love. The day following they were to meet again in Stockholm. They parted now, however, with anguish of heart. George stopped, hesitatingly, on the threshold he had so often joyously crossed. The inanimate witnesses of our happiness always retain a part of it ; nature takes away a portion of our souls ; we only discover this at the moment of making our adieu.

The major had returned a week or two before from his tour of inspection, and now went with the Chevalier de Valborg to find Christine at the cottage, and they took her back to the city. The major was more impressive than ever, and not in the least discouraged ; his traveling had done him good ; he still had his consoling doubts. "These French do not know how to love," he said to himself ; "their most ardent flames are like the burning of straw, which is brilliant, but not lasting. My turn will come. And if it should not," he continued, with less assurance, "why, I shall be always near her, to defend her and console her ; and that is no undesirable position to hold."

Their life at Stockholm was nearly the same that it had been at Haga ; the countess was surrounded by her habitual society. George, the Baron de Vendel, and the Chevalier de Valborg formed the nucleus of it.

Several supernumeraries were gathered around them. The relations of George and the baron denoted that they understood each other better ; the shrewdest eye would never have detected between them the least appearance of rivalry. It seemed as though there was a secret accord between them both, to render life around their idol charming ; not to throw over her the shadow even of a pre-occupation, or of an anxiety ; one knew how to hide his joy, the other his sadness. Each one presented to Christine a cheerful face. In juxtaposition with each other, they observed in her presence the courteous and polite forms of good society. When they passed the threshold of the saloon, they no longer knew themselves, which sometimes embarrassed the chevalier comically enough, when he found himself between the two, without knowing to which to speak, or which to follow. The countess rarely went out. It was necessary, however, for her to appear in the saloons occasionally, and she always shone there like a beautiful star, which traverses the sky and illuminates the night. She soon perceived that George was always more demonstrative in his love after one of these brilliant displays which they made in the gay world. Others would have rejoiced at it ; she was rather disposed to be troubled about it. Her delicate nature would not permit her to draw any advantage from it, even to the profit of her love ; she thought that these were unfortunate triumphs, which were able to flatter her pride, but which at the same time humiliated her heart. She did not wish that variety should ever run away with the least part of tenderness.

The count, however, had his duties of position ; she comprehended them and submitted to them, with that

abnegation which is always found at the bottom of true love. He was obliged to appear everywhere ; but, he often began and always finished his evenings with her. Social reunions of the fashionable world of Sweden are in the full height of their glory about ten o'clock in the evening. George, after concluding his official duties for the day, was in the habit of going to the house of the countess to ask for a cup of tea ; she waited for him, counting the minutes. When he was late, she would stop the clock.

The world had some suspicion of their *liaison* ; but, the world has more discretion than it gets credit for. If it lacerates without mercy those who openly offend it, it is, on the contrary, full of indulgence for those who show some regard for the proprieties which are its supreme law. Christine was adored even by the women ; and no whisper had ever tarnished the fine diamond of her honor. Those who have any heart—and they will be the smallest number—admire from a distance, and not without some secret envy—this azure sky of their love which is never veiled by any cloud. Some were astonished that a Frenchman should exhibit so much constancy ; and, in expectation of the approaching abandonment, they took the precaution to grieve in advance for Christine. In Sweden, as in Norway, they always take us for the grandchildren of the playful marquises of the eighteenth century. The mother of two or three daughters somewhat advanced in years, and not in demand for wives, alone discovered that Christine did wrong to monopolize so desirable a person, rendering him quite useless for any one else ; but, she did not constitute the majority any more than one swallow makes the spring-time.

CHAPTER XI.

AN ENTERTAINMENT — NADÉJE — FIRST UNFAITHFULNESS — RECONCILIATION — DOUBTS AND UNCERTAINTIES.

ONE evening, at an entertainment given by the Austrian ambassador, George, after having played several games of whist with one general and two diplomatists, became fatigued ; and, wishing to retire, called for his sledge. As he was passing out of the saloon, he overheard two ladies talking about him in a subdued tone. They were laughing and apparently enjoying themselves greatly at his expense. One of them was a coquettish Swede, towards whom he had committed the unpardonable offence of not paying court.

“ Is he only allowed to stay out until ten o’clock ? ” inquired the other, in a dry and sarcastic voice to her friend, who was stifling a wicked laugh behind her fan.

“ Oh ! ” replied the Swede, “ he is well looked after ; but, we must allow that he is very docile—this justice at least we must award him ! ”

One must be truly strong to carry the weight of a true love nobly, with one’s feet upon the earth and one’s head in the sky. In this, women are more successful than men ; a great passion preserves them always from little ones ; men defend themselves with far less skill. George ought to have despised such miserable raillery. He however felt himself wounded in the heart by this arrow, barbed with ridicule which he could not draw out, now it had penetrated there, and vanity whispered in his ear all sorts of evil counsels.

He slackened his pace ; and, instead of going away, entered a side gallery and passed into the saloon.

“ Pardieu !” said he to himself, “ Christine will not die if I should be half an hour late. She likes to retire late. How this woman has held on to me for a whole year !” and he looked in a mirror to arrange his dress. “ Ah !” said he, looking at his cravat ; “ *she* tied this knot !” A charming souvenir came to him and changed the current of his thoughts. “ I was about to be unjust for the first time,” he said ; “ poor, dear creature, how much more she is worth to me than the whole world beside. If she had heard me !” He started again to go away, but his bad angel whispered in his ear, “ There are two ladies in the saloon who are laughing at you.” “ Do not listen to them,” said his heart. “ Christine is waiting for you.” “ Is it not on her account that you ought to prove to them that you are your own master ? Christine would demand it of you if she were here. Do it then for her !” and he returned to the ball-room.

“ Here you are still, my dear count,” said Axel, coming to meet him. “ What will they say in the *Rue de la Reine.*”

George frowned. “ Nothing, I imagine,” he answered, dryly. “ But, chevalier, tell me who is that young lady in the pale green robe, who is talking with the Baroness de Strom ?”

“ It is a young lady.”

“ There is no doubt of that ; but, who is she ?”

“ Do you not know her then ?”

“ If I did, I should not ask you.”

“ Well, well,” continued the chevalier, “ this is singularly flattering to the amiable countess. How, do

you not know the lady even by sight ? she has been here a week. She is the new queen of the season ; the belle of the belles ; the incomparable Nadéje—Mlle. Borgiloff.

“ No, truly ; this is the first time that I have seen her.”

“ Is it possible ? you go out but little then.”

“ I ! I go out every evening.”

“ Then it must be because she comes late and you go away early. There is no harm in that, only you have lost the *début* of an elegant woman in our saloons ; but, that is a misfortune easily repaired.”

“ You will assist me, chevalier ;” and the count, going towards the door, examined Mlle. Borgiloff with an attention which, perhaps, Christine might have found a little too scrupulous.

As a fine example of feminine beauty, Nadéje was far from meriting the eulogy which the chevalier had passed upon her. She had a great deal of brilliancy ; and, in a circle of women, would always be the one who would first command notice—but, she excited attention more readily than she attracted sympathy.

There was a hardness of the lines of the facial angles, too distinctly pronounced—and, notwithstanding the firm and velvety roundness of her cheeks, one suspected the protuberance of the cheek-bones ; her hand small, but hard in the palm, dry in the clasping, with a strong thumb and fingers, slightly swelling at the phalanges and squarely cut, indicated the positive spirit, tenacious wish, and ambitious ardor of the woman who determined to succeed ; her nose very short (a little more and it would have been thrown into the shade), revealed the Kalmuc origin of her family, only recently

plunged into the great current of western civilization. Her figure was charming—better and more perfectly formed than ordinarily happens to young women ; a mouth a little large, perhaps, but with lips as red as the ripe pomegranate, revealing when she laughed, or when she talked, the humid and pearly color of her white teeth ; her beautiful hair, proudly done up on the top of her head, leaving her temples uncovered—with out a pearl, without a riband, without a flower—fell again in ringlets upon her neck. Her long eye seemed to open on hinges, like those of the feline race ; passion was capable of dilating it largely, and she used it much after the manner of the Chinese women, which gave to her physiognomy an effect singularly piquant. She played upon it as she would have done upon a musical instrument of which she had become a perfect mistress. Her expression had a complete gamut of rays so piercing and so vivacious, so softened in its faint languors, that one might suppose she could see through a veil of tears. Many women were handsomer—one rarely meets one more enchanting ; but, it was not with the qualities of her mind that she bewitched any one.

Nadéje was not rich, and this was the clay foot to her statue of gold. Her best fortune was the protection of the czar and the talent of her father, who was not high-born enough ever to arrive at the first rank in a career, where nobility is often the highest of merits. A disgrace or an illness might ruin her. Having no other independence than that found in the assured patrimony of her family, she desired to give a solid base to her future by marriage. This constant preoccupation dominated all the impulses of her youth ; if she did not stifle them ; she did not listen to them. At twenty years

of age she had adopted her course of conduct. Educated by her father in the midst of men ; mingling in all the capitals of Europe with the most intelligent society, and profiting by it all ; with that facility of assimilation which is the property of certain races, she put to the service of her little interests, the most powerful means, which she directed with all the calmness and cold artifice of a diplomat in petticoats. Having but very recently arrived in Stockholm, she had only as yet been presented in two or three saloons ; but the secretary of her ambassador had instructed her marvelously about the notables of the court and the city. She made her own notes. Decided not to remain unmarried any longer than was necessary, she pushed on towards matrimony without making any false steps on the world's slippery path. One little thing alone, she yet wanted ; and that was a husband.

When she saw the count return to the saloon, Nadéje's physiognomy underwent a change, too sudden to be very sincere. She listened no longer to the little baroness who continued her uncharitable remarks. She raised her innocent eyes to the ceiling, as if to call heaven to witness that it concealed a shade of reverie ; then she approached the mantelpiece and with her fingers extracted the bouquet from one of the roses in a china cup. She turned her shoulders towards the count with the sweep of back of a caryatid. The count could see her face, but imperfectly. Nadéje, who knew this very well, exposed at first only her profile ; but she was willing enough also to show voluntarily her opulent bust and the beautiful ornaments on her neck.

George examined her very carefully without perceiving that she was following the movements of his eyes in the mirror.

"Introduce me to this beauty ;" said he to the chevalier.

"It would appear that it is my peculiar privilege to present you to the ladies ; I forewarn you, however, that I shall not answer for the consequences."

They advanced together towards the young lady, who suddenly turned around, at the moment when they were not more than two steps from her, with a gesture of surprise which seemed to be altogether natural ; her lips opened as though she were about to utter a cry, and one could see, running over her snowy shoulders, the shiver of a sudden awaking. None of these details escaped the young diplomat.

Axel introduced the count and all three began to talk, standing near the chimney, at this moment deserted. The chevalier imagining that he was no longer wanted, soon found an excuse to leave the others to themselves. The count, without perceiving it, committed now his first infidelity. When a man feels a desire to be left alone with a young and pretty woman, it is an offence to another—to the one he loves.

The orchestra sounded the first notes of a polka, and George bowing to the young lady, offered her his hand, smiling ; she put her's into his with charming grace, at the same moment that two young officers stepped up to ask her to dance. Dancing had not yet begun ; but from a certain moving of chairs and of sofas, George perceived that they were about to dance a quadrille ; a dance which begins too soon, and finishes too late for some ; while for others, it is directly the contrary. M. de Simaine glanced at the clock and saw that it wanted a quarter to eleven. "My poor countess !" thought he ; "at what hour shall I reach her !" Diplomat as he was, he

could not entirely hide his feelings ; a shadow passed over his face and Nadéje felt a nervous trembling of the hand she held in her's. She raised her eyes, and looking at him with one of her sweetest looks : "Count ;" said she, in a timid and submissive voice ; "you asked me to dance a polka ; I would not condemn you to a cotillion !" looking as if she would go to her seat ; "one knows when a cotillion begins, but not when it will finish ;" and she attemped to disengage her hand. George retained it with a constrained politeness and observed her more closely than before. She, blushing, lowered her eyes and appeared to be troubled like a young virgin who listens to the voice of love for the first time in her life.

"It is true ;" he answered ; "that I had not hoped for so much ; but if I demanded less, I am only charmed at having obtained more."

Nadéje leaned upon the count's arm with more abandon, and he could see on her face an expression of happy acknowledgment.

The leader of the band now gave the sign for the first evolutions, and the dance went on ; the figures progressing in capricious order. By turns the couples lost themselves in the crowd, and resumed their places at will. Sometimes the cavaliers chose their dames, and then the ladies chose their cavaliers. George and Nadéje were evidently pleased with each other and showed their preference ; and soon they came to regular coquetting. George found himself, not without secret pleasure, on his ancient ground. He had lived at the feet of the countess for more than a year, without permitting himself the most innocent distraction, even with another. It is true, that he never had the desire,

but he did not think his merit any less. He said to himself, that few men in his place, could have pushed the scruples of fidelity so far, and that, up to a certain point, it was even giving Christine a proof of defiance, not to dare to amuse himself with another woman, as if she had any thing to fear in the comparison. The conclusion of all this was, that he must pay a little court to Nadéje. It is true that the young woman displayed an entire arsenal of attractions for her conquest; she was by times inclined to raillery and melancholy; sparkling with spirit or immersed in quiet. She was too skillful to permit herself to make the most indirect allusion to Christine, and M. de Simaine was not a man to permit it; but she knew how, on two or three occasions, to speak very delicately of the great sentiments of the heart, as something so beautiful, that we were bound to admire them wherever we meet them; but so rare, that when we see them, we may be excused if we become a little envious. All this was indicated, rather than said, with that supreme tact, which knows how to do it without wounding; gliding smoothly over everything and resting upon nothing. Then Nadéje danced *à merveille*; which, of course, added great persuasion to her words. The Swedish cotillion has steps of a character which develop the grace of their women and heighten the elegance of their beauty.

Nadéje knew it and abused it. In the midst of the figures which begin the emancipation of the ladies, permitting some liberty in their choice, she made the count the object of all her attentions; she solicited the handkerchief, with the humble and amorous regard of the slave who waits the good pleasure of his master; she offered him the bouquet with the gesture of a sultan

selecting his favorite. When, she was led to the fauteuil for *le pas du miroir*, all the dancers defiled before her like an army of pretenders ; a light hand passed rapidly over the glass seemed to efface each new image ; it was the sign of refusal. George came in his turn, and being the last, he bent his knee before her, on a velvet cushion. A second too long, perhaps she contemplated his face in the mirror where she perceived a shade of anxiety ; then stooping towards him, she extended her hand, as if to raise him, and they waltzed together. She danced as if she were fatigued, and George to sustain her, held her more firmly in his arms and more closely to his breast ; she seemed to bend and incline her head to his shoulder ; but all at once, disengaging herself, she cried :

“Enough, I pray you.”

The count led her to a seat, apparently as much troubled as she was.

Everything comes to an end in this world, even cotillions. The count looked at his watch ; it was nearly one o'clock, and he departed in haste. He had been intoxicated with Nadéje ; a veritable intoxication, because there was trouble in his happiness. It was no longer the emotion without alloy which he had felt a year before, in waltzing with Christine. He experienced, on the contrary, that vague inquietude which they say precedes remorse. The night air, dry and cold, calmed the unhealthy exaltation of his thoughts. “And Christine !” he exclaimed to himself for the first time in two hours. He had never been guilty before, not even in thought of so long an infidelity. It was not possible to go to her at this hour ; he, however, ordered his coachman to go by the way of the *Rue de la Reine*. It was not his way home.

"The devil must have got possession of him!" murmured the coachman, putting his fur collar up around his neck, "to tell me to make such a *détour* in this sharp north wind!" and he discharged his anger upon his poor horses who went off upon the gallop.

The countess's bed-chamber overlooked the street; it was lighted up yet, not by the soft glimmer of a night-lamp, as if to watch the sleeper, but by the brilliant light of candles which announces sleeplessness and waiting. Christine had not yet retired.

"Poor soul!" he said, burying his head in his hands; "she watches and she suffers!"

When the egotism of bad passions has not yet petrified the heart, we cannot submit to any more cruel torture than the thought of a suffering experienced for us, or caused by us, in the heart of a noble and devoted woman. These griefs are poignant with us all; and if one merit the name of man—until the calm and sweet serenity of happiness shall be brought back again into the other's mind—nothing can cure them nor console them.

The horses, who were well acquainted with the habits of their master, had of themselves, slackened their pace. "Home!" cried the count to his driver, looking up for the last time to the window. "Christine! Christine!" he said to himself, "it is you alone that I love!"

The evening before he would not have felt the necessity of talking to himself. One never protests so strongly as when one begins to doubt. He entered his own home cursing Nadéje. This was too much; it would have been better not to think of her.

On awaking in the morning, the recollections of what had passed the night before, haunted him somewhat confusedly, and he endeavored to justify himself in his

own eyes ; the better to justify himself in the eyes of the countess. After all, it was not so very great a wrong to be late in coming from a ball and to have danced a cotillion with a Russian lady, whom he had seen now for the first time. It is true that Christine was kept waiting ; but had he not been with her a few hours before, and had she not told him a hundred times, not to deprive himself of any pleasure on her account ? Without doubt ! but had he not always replied, that he had no pleasure except in her society ? Finally, if he had committed any fault at all, it must be a very slight one.

A voice whispered to him, that in love there are no little faults, and that one is very guilty so soon as there is one. It was the first pain he had ever voluntarily caused the countess, and nothing had yet blunted within him the sharp point of remorse.

Christine's servant came to inquire for him at eight o'clock. He announced that he was well, and that he would call on the countess at noon. It is not *en règle* to call upon a lady earlier in the day. Christine received him with that grace which he had never observed in any one else. He saw that she had not slept, and he thought that she had been crying. These first griefs of love which have not had time to ravage the soul, increase the beauty of the face, over which there is spread a sweet tint of languor and of melancholy. George was touched and wished to defend himself, though no one had attacked him.

"I was only anxious ;" answered Christine ; " do not make me sad."

" If you are sad ;" said he ; " I am in fault ; I am in the wrong, Christine, when you are no longer happy."

He fell upon his knees and taking her hand, added ; “ I will rise only when I am pardoned.”

“ Then get up and sin no more ;” said she, smiling. All at once becoming grave, she added :

“ If you could know, George, what I suffered last night ; if you could know all my anxieties, all my fears ! But you are here now and you love me !”

“ With all my soul, Christine !”

“ It is well ! with you, happiness returns to me. Now let us talk. This ball, then, which has been the occasion of your forgetting me was very fine, was it not ?”

“ It was brilliant, like all official balls, with epaulettes and diamonds ! Whoever has seen one, has seen them all. I do not wish to see any more of them ; let those look for pleasure, who have not yet found happiness.”

The antithesis was as old as the world and worthy of being rhymed in the confectioner’s New Year’s motto-papers. It did not the less produce its effect. The serenity of the countess was entirely restored, and with that blind confidence, common to generous natures, she was the first to speak of the necessities of the official position, of the exigencies of the world, and of the duties which his name and rank imposed upon M. de Simaine. “ Only when you must stay so late ;” she added, “ I will go out myself. I shall not pass then a whole evening without seeing you.”

The treaty of peace was signed, the name of Nadéje was not mentioned, and the countess had not even a suspicion. Christine forgot all about it, and George remembered it only to surround the object of his affections with more delicate attentions and more studious cares than ever ; it was like a second spring-time of their love, with more fire than the former.

Christine was by turns frightened and charmed at it; sometimes she abandoned herself to the happy impression, as a woman does who feels herself to be devotedly loved and who places her happiness in her love; sometimes she experienced a secret trouble accompanying these feverish ardors and surprised herself, regretting the more equable tenderness of their earlier days. Those only, who do not know the heart of man, would prefer passion to tenderness. George, however, continued to go on leading a double existence. He went into society more than ever. Was it not Christine who wished it? She was not in good health, and did not go out of the house for nearly a month. George during this month did not miss a single day in coming to finish the evening with her. We must add also that everywhere else he went he met Nadéje.

They had engaged in a regular flirtation, and people remarked it. It is true that the coquettries of the young Russian did not entangle his heart, but they occupied him when she was present, and preoccupied him when she was absent; this was too much. He enjoyed the graces of her wit with a dangerous if not culpable complaisance.

George's intentions were good; even his enemies were never able to reproach him with anything but weakness and irresolution of character. But is not decision, that virile virtue, necessary to him who holds in his hands the happiness of a woman? Discontented with himself he now became more so with others. He lost by degrees the serene equanimity of his humor. He became nervous and irritable and experienced from time to time the necessity to get angry. In these moments he would lament the perfection of the count-

ess, which gave him no pretext even to complain. He was sleeping on a volcano, which did not explode, but it was easily seen at what cost he succeeded in controlling it. That alone sufficed to make the despair of Christine, a mute despair without tears, without cries. Christine was one of those beautiful creatures, for whom devotion seems to be the first of necessities, and who are never happy except in the enjoyment of the happiness which they confer. The uneasiness of George could not long escape her, she was too discreet to reflect on him and to demand the cause, and too delicate not to suffer from it. From various symptoms she soon discovered that the thought of another woman was troubling him. She had no proof; but those who love, have they not a sort of magnetic divination which teaches them more than words? Christine besides, surrounded to-day with homage, inspiring the most noble and the best people with chivalric sentiments, and for whom her friends had a worship rather than an affection, had been unfortunate in her early youth; her heart had been bruised in the hard experiences of an unhappy marriage; she had by degrees been thrown back upon herself; she had lived in the midst of society in a true solitude of heart, and she contracted there a sort of mistrust that for a long time nothing could cure. She believed that it was equally difficult to love and impossible to be loved. She was not mistaken then, when she said to the count, that he had brought a new life to her.

This new life, so perfect, had for them all the graces, all the flowers, and all the perfumes of the spring-time and the youth of love. Christine was so happy that she soon pardoned the past. Was it not he who made the

present so beautiful? and what an acknowledgment for George! He did not love, he adored! Few women have ever known such profound and ardent joys, because to no one was the endowment of self more complete or more generous. But so soon as the doubt entered her mind, it was changed to poignant anguish. She had bravely supported her grief before loving, and now, disarmed by love, she found herself struggling with life, without courage and without force. She was suffering from ill health and knew that her beauty was failing. "George is right," she thought, "I do not deserve to be loved, if he loves me solely for my beauty." She was mistaken, she was handsome still, and George loved her as well as ever. There had been peril in the house, but nothing was lost for the defense; (only, Christine was too proud to defend herself.) She did not know the name of her rival, but she did not doubt that she had one. When she saw George looking more grave, she believed that he was dissimulating, when she found him more affectionate, "He does what he can!" said she, but still she was not reassured.

The hearts of the most honest have strange refluxes; the anxiety of Christine exaggerated the evil in her eyes; but the evil existed. (Our truest and best sentiments are subjected to certain inevitable crises; natures the most impressionable are also the most changeable. George was not unlike these; but, perhaps unknown to himself he was beginning to detach himself a little. One does not know how love comes; do we know any better how it goes? Christine had been able to retain her lover; but for her, (was it not the greatest source of unhappiness that she was obliged to exercise any influence to retain him?)

The Baron de Vendel observed her with anxiety, certain that she was suffering ; but his suffering was as discreet as it was delicate. He never mentioned any name. He was a man to hide the truth and Christine was not the woman to demand it.

George on his side was not any more calm. In place of this happiness, recently so complete, and which now seemed to be rapidly passing away from him, what had he found ? In place of a devoted woman, not wishing, not knowing anything but how to love, he had before him a coquette, accustomed to all the artifices of the world, with a hard hand, and full of cold and calculating artifice. Nadéje had perfectly understood him. She readily divined what there was in his character of indecision and feebleness, and she studied to encourage it and to discourage it by turns. She was capricious with him ; he never knew how he would be received. After several days of a growing intimacy, for him full of charms, she abruptly changed her manner towards him and discontinued those little attentions of which she had been so prodigal before, and which had so gratefully tickled the vanity of the man of the world. She was constantly surrounded by a bevy of young beaux, whom she played off against the count. Then, at the moment when he seemed to be vanquished and about to fly, she made a hecatomb of them and appeared to have regard for no one but him. A woman who really loves is incapable of these little miserable calculations ; but is the woman who loves always the woman who is loved ?

Between the count and the countess the abyss was widening every day. Nothing seemed changed at first view. Every day he went to see her ; he had always

the same care for her, and he was received by her with the same politeness. He appeared to be even more attentive ; and she seemed to be more appreciative ; but he experienced a sort of constraint ; and she, in talking with him, felt sometimes as though her tears were penetrating her voice. She never complained ; she waited in sadness the return of his love, desiring it always, hoping for it sometimes, doubting it oftener, but not willing to hurry it by a word. George found himself embarrassed between these two women. If any one had spoken to him of his quitting Christine, he would have been sincerely indignant. But he expected to carry on at the same time, an affair of the head and an affair of the heart ; or rather, without rendering too close an account to himself, he yielded by turns to diverse attractions. His was not a bad nature, and he had even a little less egotism than one meets with ordinarily in men of his class. *L* But he had not that force of will which makes character. *S* He sometimes returned to good sentiments ; then he was in better *rappoport* with his conscience ; instinctively he comprehended that the good and the true he found always in Christine, and in her alone ; he knew with what indulgent tenderness the noble woman would welcome the return of his heart. But he found in the evening that Nadéje had been charming ; in order to talk with him, she had refused to dance one mazourka and two waltzes with others ; such a sacrifice merited some acknowledgment ! *A*nd thus the two-fold life, so united, so calm and sweet, was replaced by degrees by this three-fold life, troubled with remorse and agitated with painful anxieties. *)* These bitter and rude experiences are less rare than one thinks, even in those *liaisons* which

have preserved all the liberty of choice ; and it will be found that the legal bond, so much calumniated, has not the exclusive privilege of forming badly-assorted marriages.

Christine resolved to retire within herself a little more. With her beauty, her wit, and that charm which she always had for the eyes of the count, she was still able to dazzle him ; to bring him back and to captivate him. She disdained to do what so many others would have sought to do. She wished to respect George for himself. It was a pride like any other—only, perhaps, a greater one.

The name of Nadéje was finally mentioned in Mme. de Rudden's presence by a lady-friend, with a charitable intention, and accompanied with all sorts of commentaries, about which it was not possible for her to be mistaken.

Christine did not wish to see her rival ; not but what at the bottom of her heart she might not have experienced a bitter and ardent desire to know the woman who had taken happiness away from her ; but she thought that in meeting her, there might come a struggle, which she judged would be little worthy of George or of herself. There was in such a course of conduct an incontestable nobleness of heart, and with a man more firm than M. de Simaine, the countess would have been right. But she was perhaps wrong with George, whom she must now suspect of involuntary weaknesses, and whom it was necessary to save from himself in saving him for herself.

CHAPTER XII.

A WOLF HUNT ON LAKE MÆLAR — DESPERATION OF THE WOLVES
— A RUN-AWAY — A DECLARATION OF LOVE — THE RETURN.

TOWARDS the end of January, Count de Lovendall, one of the greatest sportsmen of Sweden, brought his equipages from the North to Stockholm, and announced that he would give a hunt on Lake Mælar. The cold was intense, and hunger drove the wolves out from the woods. They came in little groups, and marauded in the suburbs of the city, and the peasants complained, and appealed to the huntsmen to come to their aid. The count sent out a large number of invitations, which were eagerly accepted. Idle society is everywhere the same, and it seizes with avidity upon all occasions to divert itself. There are so few people who are sufficient unto themselves, that they all seek amusement outside of themselves. Women were not less assiduous in it than men. They organized sledge parties ; they arranged cavalcades. Stockholm took on an air of fête, at once gallant and warlike. The Swedish ladies, nervous and hardy, excellent in all bodily exercises, are especially good horsewomen. One might easily, without going out of the fashionable world, raise among them a squadron of amazons. So, when towards ten o'clock in the morning, the hunters, disembarking by the *Place du Riddarholm*, appeared on the borders of the frozen lake, the Mælar presented at once a most brilliant and most animated scene. The outriders of the count, in gala livery, led the small troupe

towards the islands, covered with woods, where the wood-choppers had left their broken boughs. The officers, in bedizening uniforms, escorted the women in sledges ; the red coats of the hunters glared on the black cloth of the long *robes de cheval*. The snow flew from under the steel runners of the sledges, and sometimes, driven by the wind, would envelope the entire party in a white whirlwind. From time to time, a joyous flourish of music would be heard ; then all was suddenly silent, as if the sounds were frozen in their brass instruments. The chorus of sonorous laughs and of joyous prattle had its turn. The wolves were soon made aware of their danger, but fortunately a detachment of out-riders watched them in the islands. However when they approached the thickets, Count de Lovendall commanded silence in the ranks.

Christine determined to join the party ; she had been a long time shut up in her house and her friends persuaded her that exercise and fresh air would do her good. She believed them. At first she wanted to go on horseback, but it was feared that the fatigue of a long day would be too great and she resigned herself to a sledge. Her pony team was always marvelously well kept, and her driver managed his little horses four-in-hand, with great skill. The Count Lovendall passing near her, said, quite low in her ear, that she was the queen of his fête and that the other ladies were only the dames of her suite. George, the Chevalier de Valborg and the Baron de Vendel, all consummate horsemen, surrounded her sledge. Nadéje on a beautiful black horse made an ostentatious show in the centre of a group of young men. The beautiful Russian rode with more audacity than true elegance ; she

was too exacting with her horse, and it was easily seen that she had *la main dure*. The horse plunged about with her, champed his bit and covered his breast with foam.

One who has known women, as well, at least, as it is possible to know them, affirmed that he did not like amazons. He insisted that the habit of riding on horseback gives them a hardy decision, of which the results are almost always unpleasant; that they readily contract, in this violent exercise, a dangerous taste for domination, and that the use of the whip singularly compromises the amiable *douceur* which is their greatest charm. There is perhaps a little exaggeration in this idea, as there is in all absolute opinions, but there is truth in it; everything is an index for one who has eyes, and the fashion of a woman mounting her horse, is perhaps a revelation of her character to an attentive observer.

Christine, when she saw Nadéje pass her, (she knew her rival now,) thought her to be imperious and haughty. "My poor dear George," thought she, "I am sorry for him if he truly loves her, for she will never make him happy. She is handsome, but she is not good, and so many things are necessary for happiness! everything which I have not, without doubt."

Nadéje passed by the sledge. George saluted her; she smiled and returned the salute with the end of her whip, then she kissed her hand to him and rode off surrounded by her troop of admirers. Christine threw a rapid glance at the count. It was not Nadéje that he was looking at, it was herself. She saw in his eyes an expression of thoughtful melancholy and of profound tenderness. "My God!" she said, "can he love me still?" and she felt quite consoled.

"*Au galop!*" she cried to her driver, and he drove more rapidly. The four ponies bounded over the vast plain so furiously that he had great difficulty to keep command of them, and Christine filled and refilled her lungs with an atmosphere which seemed to rejuvenate her.

It was a cold and somewhat gloomy day, for it was without sun, and the sun is here the latest gayety of winter. From time to time a squall passed over the trees, moaning and shaking down the snow which fell on the sledges in light flakes, which looked like large drops of white rain.

The wolves had taken refuge in a sort of archipelago, whose islands were separated by narrow intervals of snow and ice. When the cold is so intense and the snow so deep, the wolves are more shy, and are careful not to expose themselves, and it is not easy to get them out into the open fields. The hunters, followed by the rest of the company had formed a circle around all the islands, sending their large dogs on in advance, and they now heard the sonorous ring of their voices in the distance. Then as the wolves were driven into their retreat towards the centre, their circle by degrees narrowing, they arrived finally at the farthestmost island whose dense thickets afforded them good shelter. The dogs pursued their prey bravely, supported by the whippers-in, and followed by the more intrepid hunters. Cut off on all sides, and driven into their last asylum, the wolves made a desperate attack on the dogs; but after some minutes of energetic fighting, seeing with the eye of instinct which nature gives the savage beast, that the fight was unequal, and success impossible; they thought only of flight,

and they suddenly debouched, their tusks sparkling, their hair bristling, their eyeballs glaring with fire. Harassed by the bloodhounds, decimated by the discharges from the guns, discoloring the snow with their blood, they rushed for their holes, like a volley of bullets. It was a moment of indescribable disorder; the sledges having approached too near, reined back one upon another, the women shrieked, the horses plunged about wildly, the dogs disemboweled, with their entrails exposed, raised their dying heads with the most plaintive howls. An old wolf, nearly white, veritable chief of the troupe, came up and fell at the feet of Christine's horses, giving voice to the most unearthly noises. The two ponies on the lead trembled in every limb, and falling back got entangled in their traces and frightening the two behind them, the driver was unable any longer to control them. The sledge was driven against a stump hidden by the snow, and seemed about to upset. Christine pale with fright uttered a loud cry and put her handkerchief to her mouth to stifle the name of the count, which was escaping from her lips. But it was not the count who responded.

The Baron de Vendel immediately dismounted and throwing his bridle to his groom, seized the rampant horses by their reins and quieted them.

Where was the count?

After the tumult of the first disorder, all the party, headed by the Count de Lovendall, who sounded the *bien lancer* as loudly as he could, followed the dogs and giving chase to the wolves drove them towards the city.

Nadéje was mounted on a Ukraine charger belonging to the embassy—well enough broken, but young and irritable. Since the beginning of the hunt, she had tor-

mented him without ceasing. He behaved himself tolerably well so long as he was surrounded by others, but at the moment the *sauve qui peut* became general, aroused by the noise and rush, maltreated by his mistress, excited by the flourish of the trumpets, frightened by the howling of the wolves, he tried to profit by the disorder, to disembarass himself of his unwelcome burden. Nadéje resisted very well his first attempts ; she was naturally valiant, and besides, she was sustained by her womanly *amour propre*, which she felt was in question. But, as the horse was evidently becoming the master of the situation, the count rode up and cried out to her :

“ Give me your hand ! ”

She obeyed, instinctively ; but, in giving him her hand, she struck the furious animal a final blow with her whip as a sort of bravado, and the horse, smarting with his hurt, rushed through the bushes ; and freed from all his fetters, and held only by a feeble hand, he set out upon a wild gallop across the plain, carrying Nadéje helpless upon his back, as Nessus the centaur once carried the beautiful and trembling Déjanire.

The young girl had time only to throw a look of anguish towards the count, and to say her prayers. This was at the same moment that Christine, not less frightened, cried to him for help. He saw the one but did not hear the other, in all probability ; for he immediately put spurs to his horse and followed the beautiful Russian. Nadéje by degrees, however, recovered her composure and her seat in the saddle. The children of the steppes drink in the free air ; and, when they see the white plains and the vast extent of space unrolling under their feet, they forget the chase, and surrender

themselves to the career for the pleasure they derive from it—intoxicated with its velocity, and carried away with the excitement it produces. She bent forward, sitting her horse steadily, firm in her saddle, and holding her bridle with her two hands, tried to direct the steps of the animal under her, if she could not entirely master him.

George's horse had not the same blood, nor was he of the same race; and, though he was pitilessly spurred on by his rider, he lost ground every minute.

No one else took any note of it; in the crowd, no one thinks but of himself. The chase turned all their heads; and they were, just now, much more occupied with wolves than with women. The sledges were flying over the snow in the train of the cavaliers. One poor creature alone forgot every thing around her.

Standing nearly erect in her sledge, her nostrils expanded and trembling, her pocket handkerchief in her teeth that she might breathe more freely, her eye petrified, her face pale, and with death in her soul; Christine looked on from a distance at the desperate race of George and Nadéje. She did not lose a single incident. Her eye contracting, like that of the eagle, pierced the distance, and rendered an account of the least detail with marvelous lucidity. She saw the efforts of one to slacken her course, and those of the other to precipitate his; but she could not foresee what would be the result of this struggle, and a terrible anxiety oppressed her.

The wind suddenly changed to the north and filled the eyes of the black horse with fine, penetrating snow. He stopped a moment, and seeing a thick whirlwind of it approaching, he pirouetted by a rapid *demi volte*, and

changing quickly his direction, turned round upon himself, as if he was about to describe a great circle whereof George was the centre.

The cavalier watching all his movements took an oblique course and soon came up to them. Nadéje then gathered up all her energies, and throwing herself back, loosening one rein and tightening the other, she drew her horse on one side—and he, seeing another horse standing still, finally stopped himself.

While the danger lasted, Nadéje struggled with it courageously. But her strength was exhausted, and finally it abandoned her altogether, and she dropped her bridle. George had only time to reach her and receive her fainting in his arms. The excitement had painted her cheeks in the most lively colors ; but, as soon as that was over, the blood rushed back to her heart and she became as pale as the snow, whose white carpet covered the earth. Her discolored lips uttered no sound and her eyes were sightless. But seen in this condition, and through the poesy of danger, she was, perhaps, more captivating still. She had lost her hat, and her long hair was undone ; it trembled on her neck like the wings of a black swan, and it inundated the head and the shoulders of the young man. He took her up as if she had been an infant, and her supple and charming body was abandoned to his embrace. He held her a moment in his arms until he felt the beat of her reanimated heart, then he laid her down carefully upon the snow. He had nothing to warm her with. He threw himself upon his knees before her ; and, taking her two almost frozen hands, placed them on his breast under his coat. After a time, the warmth seemed to penetrate her by degrees, a rosy tint appeared on her

cheeks, her lips moved as if she were about to speak, but no words were distinguished. George called to her in a low voice, as if he feared to awaken her from a beautiful dream : “ Nadéje ! Nadéje ! it is I ! Fear nothing ! Come back to us, Nadéje ; dear Nadéje !”

Nadéje slowly and sweetly, and, with the grace and the languor of a dying gazelle, raised her eyelids. Instead of a look, it was a tear which escaped them. “ Oh ! I was happy !” she cried ; “ I thought I was dying !” and seeing her hair undone and in disorder, she attempted to arrange it. “ I can not !” she murmured with a faint smile, letting her arms fall.

George was still on his knees before her ; he had drawn off his gloves, and was holding her icy hands in his own :—

“ Saved ! saved by you !” cried Nadéje, suddenly, looking at him with an emphasis of passionate acknowledgment. “ Oh, I shall love life, now that I owe it to you !”

A small fichu, which she wore on her neck, became detached, and George replaced it. Nadéje took his hand, and with brusque gesture kissed it ; then she put it away, blushed, and as if vanquished by the instinct of modesty, buried her head in her two hands. George separated them with difficulty, and found that her face was bathed in tears.

Christine was forgotten !

“ You love me, then ?” he cried, folding her in his arms.

“ He asks me !” she murmured, with the voice of an angel.

They exchanged a thousand promises and a thousand oaths in a single kiss. Nadéje was the first to disen-

gage herself from the embrace, which she did with more vivacity than would naturally attend the sentimental languor in which she appeared to be plunged. George, surprised, raised his eye. The eye of Nadéje was fixed, and her extended hand pointed towards Stockholm.

“Oh, that woman!” she murmured, wildly; “she comes to take you away from me. She must not!” and she leaned her head upon George’s breast.

He aroused himself, and perceived in the distance a little black point, immovable at first, but growing larger as it approached; then it became more and more distinct. It was Christine’s sledge!

The countess, as we have already said, followed the chase at some distance; she came late upon the scene, but she lost none of the vicissitudes of the course. With her eye and with her thought, she had watched the flight of Nadéje, and the pursuit of the count. When she saw them running, and at a distance from each other, she had only experienced a vague inquietude; when she perceived that they had stopped, and were together again, the inquietude became a real fear, and very soon a poignant anguish. The race, the air, the crowd, the animation of the chase, the thousand joyous noises; the sound of the trumpets heard at intervals; all these excited her nerves, troubled her blood, exalted her imagination, and she took one of those violent parts, which, in her calmer moments, she would have repulsed as unworthy of her. She had only one idea; and that was to separate them; to interrupt their *tête-à-tête*, to overpower them by her presence, and recover George.

Christine was prompt in execution. But notwith-

standing the lively emotion, she had that possession of herself, at least, objectively, which never abandons a woman of the world. She slackened her pace, and the major and Axel imitated her.

"I am afraid," said she to the chevalier, "that some misfortune has happened to Mlle. Borgiloff. A moment ago *they* were (she would not pronounce the count's name), they were at the top of that little bunch of willows; I saw them running still farther. Now I see them no longer! Yes; there! there! a brown spot on the snow! If it be they; they have stopped; perhaps an accident; it would not be human to leave a poor young girl, wounded, to freeze on the lake. I am not acquainted with Mlle. Borgiloff, but there are duties one woman owes to another. I will offer her a place in my sledge. Come on, Messieurs! Who loves me will follow me!"

All this was said with the ease and exquisite grace natural to her. The chevalier, however, could not control the astonishment which his look betrayed. M. de Vendel had already given directions to the driver, and all together set out on a gallop in the direction of the little group. The whip gave wings to the sledge, and it was with difficulty that the major and the chevalier, although both were well mounted, could keep pace with it.

In a few minutes, which seemed centuries to the impatient Christine, they arrived in the vicinity of the fugitives. The countess leaned out of her sledge, but the two horses stood between her vision and its object, hindering her view. Over their heads a flock of crows was careering, croaking dismally; their mobile shadows making spots on the snow. One would have thought that they scented prey.

"There must have been a misfortune!" thought Christine; who felt goodness enter her heart so soon as bitter anxiety gave place to it.

They soon arrived at the spot. George was holding the two horses by their bridles; who, champing their bits, were restive at the approach of the others.

"Where is Mlle. Borgiloff?" inquired Christine.

Nadéje came forward, and stood before the countess.

"A thousand thanks, countess," she said, saluting her; "it is nothing; a little fatigue; an excitement; but the danger was great. M. de Simaine has saved my life."

These few last words entered Christine's heart like a poniard, and the count knew that she was suffering. "Mademoiselle exaggerates," said he, recovering his calmness; "her horse was running away; my only interference was to stop him by seizing his bridle."

"At the moment in which I had abandoned it!" said Nadéje, closing her eyes, as if the peril she had been in was still before her.

The countess looked from one to the other, mutely interrogating them for the truth. The count was very pale, and his eye seemed to avoid that of Christine. The face of Nadéje, on the contrary, wore the animated tint which the incarnation of happiness alone gives. She looked her twenty years. A moment after she assumed an air of naïve awkwardness, and lowered her eyes, as if she were afraid of allowing too many things to be seen there.

They did not attempt to recover her hat, for it had been driven by the wind far away over the steppe; but they could not allow her to ride with three gentlemen with her head uncovered.

Christine offered her a seat in the sledge by her side, which she accepted. She next covered her with furs, and with her own hand put a red silk handkerchief, which she found in the pocket of her pelisse, over the young girl's head, turban-fashion. It gave her the appearance of a piquant *soubrette* by the side of a great lady—but the *soubrette* was only twenty years old!

They took the way to Stockholm, talking like old friends. The count, in Christine's presence, soon allowed his foolish exaltation to disappear. He became grave and sad; all because of this great affliction, so little merited, which he knew he had brought upon the countess. He was able to read the countess's face, as we would read a book whose familiar pages we have many times turned. He knew the energy and the suddenness of her impressions, and he knew what secret, but violent rebounds, stifled in her heart, changed completely her pure and serene physiognomy. A bluish circle surrounded her eyes, and over her hands, nervous chills were running. From time to time she looked at Nadéje; "If he loves her," thought she, "I must love her also; if I can." Once or twice she looked at George, who was riding near the chevalier, by the side of the sledge. He tormented his horse mechanically; all his movements were in jerks and nervous. The thoughts which were running rapidly through his brain were reflected on his mobile physiognomy. He was discontented with himself; and reproached himself with having been in so much haste to become engaged to Nadéje; he saw the ridiculous position of Christine, riding in her own sledge, with her rival by her side, and he was angry with her for making such a spectacle on the public highway. Then

the souvenirs of the past came to him, and he remembered the inexhaustible goodness of Christine, her exquisite delicacy, her profound tenderness, her boundless devotion, and he began to comprehend at what price he had sacrificed the treasures of such a love. Christine looked at him by accident in one of those moments in which he appeared to be himself, and she comprehended what was passing in his troubled heart ; she understood the struggle, and with that insensible mistrust, of which a year of happiness had not been able to cure her, said : “ He is drawn to her invincibly ; and how good he is ; he retreats from my side full of regret that he is making me unhappy ; full of tenderness still, of pity and of compassion ; he perhaps sacrifices himself ! That I do not desire.”

CHAPTER XIII.

THE BALL AFTER THE HUNT — THE SUPPER — THE DANCE — CORRESPONDENCE.

THE Count de Lovendall was fond of making his fêtes complete, and in the evening he gave a ball to those who had participated in the amusement of the morning. The excitement was great and pleasure reigned everywhere. The men talked about Nadéje, the women stared at George ; he needed only to pose himself as hero of romance, but he had too much tact to do it ; besides, the state of his mind did not permit him to play any part, whatever it might be. He no longer had any wish of his own, he allowed himself to

be controlled by events, alternating between fears and desires, hopes and remorse, with a troubled heart and unsteady mind, no longer distinguishing duty and not knowing where to look for happiness ; fatally condemned, do what he would to deceive one woman, and doing that, he necessarily deceived them both ; he abandoned his life to fortune and left to hazard the care of regulating his conduct. The emotions of the day which had so violently excited him, seemed to have relaxed his nerves in pacifying them. He went into the saloons of the count without knowing what he might do there. Christine was not there and he was tempted to rejoice at it, which was certainly a bad enough thought. It is true that if Nadéje had been absent, he would not have been any less pleased ; what he feared above all was to see them both there together. However, as Nadéje was there, it was impossible for him not to go to her to inquire after her health. She was very pale and did not seem to be entirely restored. She did not wear this evening, her habitual air, that icy *maintien* of skeptical indifference, which more than once had wounded the susceptibilities of the count, and irritated his pride. She appeared on the contrary, pensive and as if she were patiently meditating on her great happiness in prospect. She received the count with a mixture of amorous timidity, and of unaffected acknowledgment, and called him her saviour. He seated himself near her, but she soon perceived that he was sad. Skillful enough not to appear to notice a condition of things which she comprehended too well not to fear, she contrived to avoid it ; then by degrees, cautiously managed transitions and transparent allusions, she led him towards subjects less dangerous for her. George

listened, perhaps at first, with indifference, then unknown to himself driven on by the magnetic charm with which every young and handsome woman knows how to persuade her lover, he gave himself up entirely to it.

Before his eyes, confused images were passing, burning souvenirs of the morning were rekindled in his mind, he again saw the young girl seated on the snow, very near to him, trembling, almost in his arms, her hands in his, and, so to say, reanimated by his breath. He still felt the kiss on his lips with which they had exchanged their oaths of love and fidelity. He looked at her and thought her more beautiful than ever ; he compared her uncovered shoulders to all the various degrees of whiteness which have furnished metaphors to the poets, to the fur of the ermine, to the down of the swan, to the jasmine and to the camellias, to the albatross and to the marble of Paros, to the lily which opens its silver chalice and to the hawthorn in flower — and he thought also of what had happened some hours before, when they were both away off by themselves, almost lost in the immense space ; of Christine's coming and interrupting this winter-morning dream. He asked nothing better than to continue as they were now ; and Nadéje's eyes did not say no.

The folding-doors opened and Mme. de Rudden was announced.

Christine had comprehended that the future of her heart was to be made a plaything of this evening. There are decisive hours in one's lifetime. It produced on her, at the last moment, a rapid reaction. She shook off her languor and determined to see her rival face to face. So, after having declared that she

would not go to the ball, she dressed herself at the last moment and demanded her carriage.

No one dressed in better taste than she ; her toilette was a *chef d'œuvre*, and when she entered the saloon a movement of admiration turned all eyes towards her ; her dress seemed to caress her body rather than to cover it ; her uncovered shoulders disclosed a well-turned neck and in the fair and warm brilliancy of its radiance, it shone under the transparent undulations of gauze, from which her head seemed to disengage itself, as a star shoots its rays through a silver cloud. For the first time she had arranged her hair—ordinarily too chastely plaited on her temples—around her forehead, and light, aerial and animated with life, it trembled and illuminated with rich *reflets d'or*, her large and beautiful temples with their net-work of blue veins.

In looking at her one would have said that she was a young queen come to lay down her crown. She passed by the side of the count ; saw him but did not turn. She went and took a seat in the boudoir of the Countess de Lovendall ; a group of men followed her of which she became the centre ; she animated them all by her presence, by her words and with her charms. Her own friends said they did not recognize her. George observed her from a distance with a mixture of astonishment and of curiosity, of pleasure and of vague inquietude. Nadéje understood it and as these sentiments might become dangerous, she said, “ Go and speak to her !” with the refinement of policy of a Machiavelli *en robe de satin*. He obeyed without replying and mingled with the group of flatterers and admirers. Christine saw him and experienced a feel-

ing of secret joy. He found occasion to address a few words to her, to which she replied as she did to every one else. He was not a little vexed and in his own mind accused of coquetry, the woman who for the year past had kept company with no other man than he ; and it was thought, even, that he murmured, quite low, the word ingratitude. Who can penetrate the sorrowful mind through the mask of a smiling face ? George returned to Nadéje and spoke to her of love, with anger. The air was not in accord with the song ; but Mlle. Borgiloff was indulgent even ! By degrees he became excited himself, without any need of help. He found that Nadéje was simple and natural ; that she had no need of auditors, like Christine, and that, for his part he had always liked better the dialogue of two than the public discourse ; he hesitated and became confused, and after having began by not saying what he thought, he finished by thinking what he said. When the guests passed into the supper-room he led in Nadéje. Christine on the arm of the major took a seat at one table and the count and Nadéje sat down to another. Two or three dowagers, who for twenty years had ceased to know any amorous sensations prepared themselves to watch the lovers.

In Sweden, they prolong through the whole of January the pacific reign of the twelfth-night kings, and each feast sees its favorite win the crown, by finding the bean in the cake. Fortune, who, of course is a woman, is sometimes cruelly capricious. She gave the bean of the first table to Christine, who crowned the Baron de Vendel ; and that of the second to George, who shared his throne with Nadéje.

We have done wrong to abolish this meal of supper ; it is the gayest repast and comes off at the happiest moment of the day. Its place will never be filled. The supper of Count de Lovendall was charming. Wit sparkled with the foam of the wine of Ai ; the different groups exchanged toasts ; every time they drank, they mingled the names of kings and queens, saluting them with acclamations and hurrahs ; mischievous insinuations came from every lip ; light shafts crossed each other like arrows which go whistling in the air, and all enjoyed themselves and thought there were excellent reasons why these reunions should never be discontinued.

Mme. de Rudden heard it all ; but did not speak. The major made as if he did not understand it. Nadéje blushed, and George drank ; but there were four troubled hearts there.

After the supper they organized one of those promenades in the saloons—a mingling of music and of dancing—so celebrated in the North, under the name of *Polonaises*. Nowhere is the beauty of a woman, or the elegance of a man displayed with greater grace and majesty, in a splendor more grandiose or more solemn. The partners approach each other slowly, with a step cadenced on an indolent rhythm, which gives to the entire body a harmonious balance ; their flexible figures rise and fall, undulating by turn ; it is thus that a troupe of white swans look swimming down a river, their movements hidden by the dandling waves. The Count de Lovendall who led the dance, had given his hand to Mme. de Rudden, the others following in couples. The cavalier offers to his partner, sometimes one hand and sometimes the other ; sometimes he hard-

ly dares to touch the ends of the delicate fingers, and sometimes he imprisons them in his hand ; then, without quitting the one he has chosen, he passes from her right to left, and from her left to her right ; the same movement is repeated down the whole line, which in turn, to the appeals of the orchestra, hurries or slackens the measure ; then following the steps of her guide, she assists to form ingenious arabesques, compact, complicated, and inextricable, but correct like living alleys of a labyrinth which moves in such a manner that the animated riband, contorted in every direction, could, without breaking, form a thousand knots and then undo them. Then at a given signal, all hands part ; all the couples are dispersed as in a regular tumult, and each gentleman, in his turn, passes before his partner, puts his hand into hers and turns with her.

When these exchanges brought George in front of Christine, they were both profoundly moved ; he experienced a nervous irritation ; she a painful palpitation. But the occasion was not propitious ; society is not favorable to the expansion of hearts ; it binds them more closely and drives them back upon themselves. It is solitude which invites disclosures. Two gloved hands nearly touch each other ; but the electric fluid does not gush forth ; their looks do not meet—those exciting looks, which tremble and shine through our tears.

Explanations in love are too often useless : so soon as the sweet harmony of hearts is interrupted, it is quite probable that nothing will serve to re-establish it. Christine knew this, and she knew also that in these sad ruptures which give so dazzling a lie to the prom-

ises of the eternity of human sentiments, and which cause us to remember so bitterly, the nothingness and the emptiness of our hearts; it is not necessary that we should seek to know whence come these wrongs, or who is in fault. It is so rare that the temperaments of the two are the same; or that they have similar tastes, when they no longer walk in the same path, on the same road they have been following together; every step they take beyond, separates them and removes them farther and farther from each other. [It is the first step that must be watched!]

But of what use is it to write the sorrowful history of these heart-rendings, these hidden wounds whose blood is discharged inwardly and suffocates us? Who, alas! has not known this fatal concentration of little things, which become great; these thorn-piercings of daily life, which, by degrees, envenom it; these latent and underhand misunderstandings, which show themselves and break out in sudden raptures; while still, perhaps, they love each other. In love every thing is so easily irreparable, unless the man, through unexpected and burning returns of passion, should break and melt the forming ice, or that the woman, by the devotion of her love, should disarm an annoying irritability in the other.

Christine would have been able to do it, without doubt; but she did not dare to. Had she been happy, she might have attempted it; but she was disarmed by the grief she knew it would bring to George. An unconquerable sadness took possession of her, and henceforward incurable in her melancholy, shut up in her mute caprices, as in a tower; absorbed in the regret for the vanished ideal, and forced back more and more

on her love and on herself; she was not capable of those passionate flights—sovereign inspirations of love in his supreme crises—whose violence disturbs two souls and rends one from the other. But she was at least ardently enough enamored to know how to die, now, for the sentiment which once gave her life. Like all who really love, no amount of suffering could discourage her; after having traversed slowly the phase of inebriation, she entered resolutely upon that of grief. Her love had been her life, and sweet or bitter, it no longer depended upon herself to escape from it.

The next day after the ball, when the count called upon her, he was informed that she was absent: and he was excessively irritated. Ah, if he had seen her behind the window-curtain looking at him and crying!

CHRISTINE TO MAÏA.

“The day of tears has come: he loves me no longer! I am sure of it; the illusion lives no longer with me, and all is finished! Do not attempt to console me, it would be useless; above all, do not tell me, as all maladroit egotists would; I predicted it! Pity me; cry with me; that is all I ask; or rather, I ask nothing! Ah! my dear, dear friend! where are you? Pardon me! I offend you perhaps, but you know very well, that I would not say anything unkind; to you especially. But you see I suffer cruelly; and I don’t know how to suffer; alas! I have only learned it too well! He loves me no longer! Maïa, I feel that all is finished for me in this world! Oh, with what ties he had bound me again to this life, which to-day he has broken! ‘He loves me no longer!’ For two days I have repeated this phrase every hour, every minute; ‘he loves me no longer!’ He has, how-

ever, a noble heart ! He would repudiate infidelity ; he suffers as much as I do ; he struggles courageously, generously ; but you know your friend, Maïa ; you know whether I am a woman to wish for this struggle or ever to accept a sacrifice. Oh, how one is punished in one's happiness. I placed my joy in this heart which came to me voluntarily, and in following its own inclination. I repulse even the idea of a licen, which takes him from me with the power to restore him again ; the liberty of giving and taking at pleasure ; and now I am to regret not having even this last consolation of his assured presence.

“ How has this happened ? you will inquire. How do I know ? Do we ever know how misfortune comes ? We see it only when it does come. It is, besides, always the same story ; with all women it is the same thing. A young Russian arrived here named Nadéje Borgiloff ; neither beautiful nor ugly ; rather good-looking ; what the French call *la beauté du diable* : only nineteen years old ! oh, how proud they are of their youth !

“ They are right, after all, since nothing can replace it, and with it goes every thing else. He met her somewhere ; I do not know where ; it is not important ! Do you see, Maïa, I was wrong, perhaps, to lead such a life of isolation ; I should have gone more frequently into society.

“ And if I had gone there ! Ah, your mother was right ; nothing can be avoided ; what is written is written. He fell desperately in love with her suddenly as he did with me ; and there is the danger and the chastisement of these sudden attachments ; they go as suddenly as they come ; nothing precedes them ; nothing follows them.

"But for me, my dear, would you believe it? I love him better since I no longer have him; not with the vulgar sentiment, too common among women, who have become enamored with the impossible, and attach themselves to those who care nothing for them; but especially because, I saw how noble and how good he was. If you could know how distracted he is, and how he would like to love me still. I am obliged to admire him when he wounds me; and if I wished; ah, my dear friend, *if I wished!* This is my last consolation, and I must not abuse it. With a word I could bring him to my feet; but were I to utter it, I feel I should be worthy neither of him nor of myself; and then, how long would he remain there? The man who is once raised, never falls to his knees again. Let him be free, then; free entirely; free without remorse! I did not deceive you, when I said that I loved him dearly, and that I would not willingly be either a chagrin, or an obstacle to his life. I experience now the bitter joy of the sacrifice; this will be without doubt my last happiness here below! One thing grieves me however, I am afraid he will not be happy! He told me so often, that he was so when he was with me! If I were his sister, he should never marry this woman; she is ambitious and cold; I saw that at once; I believe that she has no heart, except what she carries in her head. The count is rich; he has a brilliant future; he will take her to Paris! Behold how marriages are made! Do you believe, Maïa, that many men are loved for themselves? And when we love them thus, how do they recompense us? Adieu, Maïa, even to you I would not explain. During the short period that happiness had its enchantments for me, I always promised myself to be ready to meet

misfortune when it should come, and now I must keep my word ! Adieu."

MAÏA TO CHRISTINE.

" Foolish creature, you frighten me ! Fortunately we have a congé and the snow is still passable for sledges. Expect me, for I am coming to see you. My dear Christine, you see a baroness at your feet ; I will place the baron there if you wish ; but, I conjure you, let there be no useless precipitation, nothing irrevocable ; nothing irreparable. Nothing ! do you hear ? Nothing until I see you. Wait ; it is all I ask of you for fifteen years of true affection. Ah, be a little unhappy and you will see if any one will love you. I have read your letter over and over again, and it always give me a chill. You know it, my friendship is as anxious and as much troubled as if it were love. I think I was born to be a friend ; to be your friend ! If you do not promise me to be prudent, I shall appear before you as I am, in my furs, and without my baron.

" But laugh a little, poor child ; you see that I do not like to cry. Adieu, Christine ; I love you tenderly."

GEORGE DE SIMAINE TO HENRY DE PIENNES.

" I would give you a hundred or even a thousand chances ; but no, you would never guess. Throw language to the dogs, I like better to tell you at once ; and when I shall have told you, I will permit you not to believe it. The Countess de Rudden, this Christine that I have loved so dearly—who loved me too, I thought so at least, and so did she, I imagine—well, my friend, she is to be married, and not to me ! She

has refused me ! She marries a certain Baron de Vendel, a gallant man, certainly, who has made court to her, I will do him the justice to say, for ten years at least. You see that virtue is always rewarded ! I did not expect it, and it came upon me like a clap of thunder which has not been preceded by the lightning. It struck me, not unto death, however ; it stunned me, certainly, I will admit that ! It was not from her that I learned the news ; she does not condescend to see me. It is through the Chevalier de Valborg who knows everything, that I hear it. It is public talk.

“ There has not been any good cause for this. When I say that, I might qualify it by saying that there has been perhaps a little coquetry with the young Russian I have spoken of, Mlle. Borgiloff. I danced with her till two o’clock in the morning ; but matters like that happen every day. Her horse ran away with her, and I stopped him, and saved her life. Any gendarme would have done as much ; and then, you see, I do not wish to hide anything from you. There was a twelfth-night cake, whose bean I gave to her. She ate it ; that was all ! Since this time, Christine is completely changed. Besides we are not, neither she nor I, people who can quarrel and make up ; the first word must be the last, and the words need not even be pronounced. You remember those little white ermines of our dear Brittany ; a stain spoils them ; so it is with our love ; and still, there is only a suspicion of a stain !

“ I have been truly sad, a hundred times more so than I can tell you. We cannot break these strong attachments in a single day without a bleeding at the heart. And she ! Well, I tell you that I have my fears ; I saw her one day in her carriage, so pale ! After that, she

was always pale. Finally, I went to see her ; I owed so much to her, Henry ; and if I had not, I should still have gone ! Have I not existed in the sunshine of her smiles for a year—a year, so short and yet so long ! With a tear, a word, a caress, so many things are repaired ; so many wrongs are forgotten ! She would not receive me ! I went again and they told me that she was no longer in Stockholm. That somewhat angered me. I was delirious for a day or two. I believe too, that I was very severe towards Nadéje, who supported it all with a touching resignation ; she seemed to be asking my pardon because I was suffering. This girl has a good heart and she really merits all that I can do for her. She is not rich ; she told me so, without any false pride or embarrassment, like a woman who does not know how to scheme, but wishes to make a clean breast of it. But have I not enough for two ; and is it not a happiness to give to the one we love ?

“ Finally, my dear Henry, three or four days of my life have made me comprehend the torments of the damned ! I did not know whether to break with Nadéje—could I have done it ?—or to renew with Christine—would she have done it ?

“ I went one evening into a company where I saw that the people looked upon me curiously. The women seemed to pity me. You know this mockish pity, more intolerable than the insults of men ! The Chevalier de Valborg came up to me, and I looked him in the eyes. I believe, God help me ! that I could have voluntarily sought a quarrel.

“ ‘ Well, my friend,’ he said, taking me by the hand, ‘ are you a philosopher ? ’

“ ‘ Like Chamfort,’ I replied, ‘ I swallow a mortifica-

tion every morning ; this aids my digestion for the rest of the day.'

"' The means are heroic ; and to-day ?'

"' I have swallowed two.'

"' That is well.'

"' Conclude then ; what is the matter ?'

"' A marriage.'

" This chilled me. ' What marriage, mine ? Things proceed rapidly.' And on my part I felt much irritated against Nadéje.

"' No,' replied the chevalier ! ' I wanted to speak of that of the countess.'

"' Ah, she is to be married, then ?'

"' Did you not know it ?'

"' Upon honor, no ; whom does she marry ?'

"' M. le Baron de Vendel !'

"' That is as it should be ! ' I replied. ' I have nothing to hide from you, Henry ; even in my happiest days I have always been a little jealous of this man.'

" The news completely upset me. She ! Christine ! already ! she who appeared to love me so much. How can we believe in women after this !

"' Well ; ' my executioner said to me, ' it seems that the mortification sticks in your throat.'

" I thought I should not be able to contain myself. I felt a cloud over my eyes ; I could have strangled the chevalier, with pleasure. There are moments in life when the civilized man disappears in me, to give place to the savage. In these moments I feel as though I had the tiger's blood in my veins.

" But I reflected that a scene of violence would be too scandalous for the diplomatic corps, and I answered

with my best smile, ‘that the two marriages might come off at the same time !’

“‘ Whose is the other ?’ he inquired, with an astonishment, real or feigned.

“‘ Mine, if it would not displease you.’

“‘ With whom ?’

“‘ With Mlle. Borgiloff.’

“‘ Shall I announce it to the countess ?’

“‘ Did she charge you to announce hers to me ?’

“‘ No, truly.’

“‘ Then wait ; she will receive cards from me.’

“‘ Like all the rest of the world.’

“‘ Without doubt. Will you be a witness for me ?’

“‘ I shall be Mme. de Rudden’s ;’ he replied. We saluted coldly, and I turned my back upon him.

“ The day following I made a formal demand for the hand of Mlle. Borgiloff in marriage. It was accorded to me by her father, with a flattering *empressement*. Since which time I ought to be the happiest of men. Nadéje is young ; she is beautiful ; she loves me, and I love her, also, since Christine has been jealous of her ! I invite you to the nuptials ; they will be very simple ; my joy is not noisy ; besides, we are hastening matters ; it is necessary, at whatever price, to escape from false positions.

“ We shall not wait the wedding presents from Paris. My wife—this word seems strange to my pen, and I do not yet know how to write it—my wife, then, will go to select them afterward. Adieu. If you should ever have any wish to realise a romance in reality, think of the current chapter of my life !”

CHAPTER XIV.

GOSSIP, AND ITS CONSEQUENCES.

IN the same degree with which the count absented himself from Mme. de Rudden, the major frequented her house ; from his good heart first and foremost, and in order not to leave her to her isolation and her grief ; he had besides, undoubtedly, a secret hope of turning the occasion to his own benefit. With a smile Christine could make him happy for a week ; she smiled on him several times the same week. The misfortune which had come upon her, instead of exasperating her, only assisted her the better to compassionate others since in experiencing more, she was enabled more wisely to comprehend. The baron reminded her of her old promises.

"I have never promised anything."

"You have not forbidden me to hope."

"Have I any means to prevent it ?"

M. de Vendel thought he discovered in the words of Christine an acquiescence to his wishes, and he surrounded her with the most impressive cares. He was a man utterly incapable of an indiscretion ; but if his mouth were mute, his eyes were eloquent ; they talked of happiness. The world translated it as it always does, in a contrary sense ; and the Chevalier de Valsborg took care to publish it with commentaries.

Something of these stories came to the ears of the countess ; she did nothing to confirm them ; nothing to give the lie to them. She was preoccupied only

with the effect they would produce upon M. de Simaine. She said to herself that they would put an end to all manner of incertitude, which had now become intolerable. If George still loved her, this violent blow, which she would not have given him, would lead him to her ; and if she were to follow the counsels of Maïa ! How, by indissoluble ties, she might bind this feeble heart to hers, and make him happy in spite of himself !

If, on the contrary, she was no longer loved—loved as she wished to be,—if George was so preoccupied with another, that she had already become indifferent to him, she would free him and give him that liberty which he was too noble ever to ask, but which she was too proud not to grant to him.

Christine, in acting thus, obeyed a generous inspiration ; but she made no calculations for anger, which may derange the wisest plans ; or for vanity, which is so often discovered to be the foundation of love with man. She did not yet know of what violent action George was capable ; of what sudden and desperate resolutions !

The news of the countess's approaching marriage was industriously circulated throughout the city. People felicitated the baron, who only faintly denied it, because he believed in it himself. Christine did not show herself, and that gave color to the report. In the mornings, in the circle of the ambassadresses, many smart things were said of the count's misfortune. He thought to turn the laugh to the other side, by getting the start of the countess in his marriage with Nadéje, which was at length officially announced.

The news was brought to Christine by Valborg, and it gave a mortal blow to her heart. She demanded the

details, and listened to them with feverish avidity. She was anxious to know if people thought the parties loved each other.

"They adore each other!" replied the chevalier; "and it is partly my fault. Only think of it! it was I who introduced the count to Mlle. Borgiloff."

M. de Valborg looked at the countess; but her face was hidden behind a Chinese fan, and he could not see the heart-broken look which it wore.

"He has not lost any time;" she said, continuing the conversation on this sorrowful subject, almost in spite of herself.

"And I have been the whole cause of it," said the chevalier.

"How is that?"

"In telling him of your approaching marriage."

"Ah, how did he receive the news?"

"Very well—that is to say, very ill. I think he wanted to throttle me. But I pardon him cheerfully, poor count; for, countess, I can very well understand that one cannot lose a woman like you without great regret; as for me, I should never become resigned to it."

The chevalier waited to see the effect of this compliment. But she did not appear to take any notice of it.

"So you announced my marriage to him as a thing already resolved upon?"

"Positively; it was that which decided him. His eye fairly flashed fire. But he soon calmed down, and I saw that he had taken his resolution."

"I think, chevalier, that you have manifested far more zeal in this matter than was demanded of you."

Who charged you with publishing the banns of my marriage?"

"Why, countess, it was the news of the day; and you know, one always likes to tell the news. It makes conversation interesting. But I should have done far better to listen."

The countess shrugged her shoulders, and inquired: "When are they to be married?"

"It is said, on the first of March."

"We are now at the 20th of February. It is well to hurry things!"

"And you, countess, when are you to be married?"

"Nothing is yet determined upon."

"How is that?" said Valborg, recoiling on his fauteuil. "Nothing determined upon! But then——" looking earnestly at the countess—upon that face on which profound grief was painted—and daylight began to dawn upon him, and he began to suspect the truth; and seizing her hand, he said:

"Countess, countess, pardon me! My God, what have I done!"

"Secured the happiness of your friend, without doubt; there is nothing in that to trouble you."

"His happiness! Ah, one never loves twice!"

"No? One may love a hundred times—men, at least, may. Did you not say just now that they adored each other!"

"I do not know what I said," replied Valborg, looking for his hat.

"Perhaps, then, it would be better to talk less;" the countess replied.

She made him no farther reproach; and when he passed out of the saloon, she hid her head in her hands and wept.

CHAPTER XV.

A WEDDING AND A SOUVENIR — AN UNKNOWN ORGANIST.

THE count was hurrying on his affairs to a prompt *denouement*, and his mind was in a state of anxious excitement. "Behold a man who loves his wife!" said the superficial observer; *a clairvoyant eye would more likely have discovered the indices of a troubled heart, laboring for diversion. True happiness is more calm.* Nadéje was occupied with wedding-dresses and presents. She did not trouble herself with the cares of her *fiancé*. One cannot see everything at once; she was looking at laces! Perhaps George did not come to see her as often as he should; but would they not have time enough to be together after they were married, since they would then be bound never to quit each other? She took care to send a card to the countess, addressed by her own hand. George knew nothing of it; if he had, *he would probably have thought it in doubtful taste.*

Events mature at their appointed time. George regretted, perhaps, on the morning of the first of March, that the year was not Leap year; but the time for reflection was past; some hours yet, and the last word of his young and free life would be uttered. He had no friend near him; and the thoughts which he could not confide to any one fell heavily upon his heart.

Nadéje was the daughter of a Polish mother; she had been educated in the Catholic religion, Apostolic

and Roman. The nuptials must therefore take place in the chapel of that communion, which was near the convent *des Dames-Françaises*; which served as a church for all the Catholic Swedes, as well as for the two queens. The hour was fixed at midday; but long before the time, a fashionable crowd filled the body of the church. All the strangers of distinction, and all the elegant society of Stockholm were there, minus Christine and the Baron de Vendel. The Chevalier de Valborg, leaning against the large vase of red porphyry, which serves as a baptismal font, appeared careworn. One would have thought that it was his own *fiancée* that another was about to espouse. Some young men gathered around him and endeavored to make him talk, but he appeared disposed to be discreet, for the first time in his life.

As the clock struck the hour, four or five carriages stopped before the church. The Swiss, in grand costume, his sword by his side, and his halberd in his hand, opened the folding-doors, and the count appeared, leading Nadéje by the hand.

She wore her beautiful costume with a supreme elegance; her long veil of white lace trained behind her like the mantle of a queen. She was received with a flattering murmur. They may have thought that for a young girl she showed too much assurance; but she was so near to becoming a woman! As to George, he showed the undisturbed dignity of the well-born man, who feels that all eyes are fixed upon him, and who guards his thoughts and hides his impressions from the world.

An old white-haired priest soon began the ceremonies of the Catholic rite, in the midst of an assembly of

strangers, who admired, not without some astonishment, their grandiose poesy, and the biblical souvenirs of the patriarchs, mingled with the pomp of the sacrament ; he remembered the sweet and charming images of those heroines of the family, the strength and adornment of man, the poesy of the tent, the flowers of the desert ; the grace of the chaste fireside ; Rebecca, Rachel, Ruth and Naomi, fecund and blessed mothers ; and he invoked on the heads inclined before him, the favors of the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob ; who made the race of Israel as numerous as the sands on the sea-shore.

When the preacher demanded of the Count George de Simaine, in a loud voice, if he would take Nadéje Borgiloff, present before him, for his wife and legitimate spouse—at the very moment when the *fiancé* pronounced the fatal *yes*, a sound was heard like a wail from the organ ; a sigh in the pipes ; an indistinct groan ; and George appeared to be seized with some involuntary trouble ; Nadéje called him to himself by a cold and stern look ; and in her turn, she answered the question addressed to her in a loud and sonorous voice. The preacher ascended to the altar and celebrated the mass ; then, at the moment indicated in the liturgy, he turned towards the assembly and came again towards the spouses ; two acolytes lifted above their heads the floating folds of the symbolical veil ; the curtain of the organ was moved ; a prelude of a sweet and sad harmony threw over the assembly a nervous chill, and in a few moments the song burst forth ; a group of harmonious chords, vibrating, pathetic and inspired. A light aerial melody seemed to penetrate the dome of the church, and to hover over the

heads of the ravished crowd. Very few artists, either in Stockholm or elsewhere, would have been able thus to pour out their souls through the insensible ivories. They listened to it ; but no one understood it. George alone comprehended it ; for, in the first notes, he had recognised the song of love and melancholy that he heard for the first time on the boat of Skokloster, and again on that beautiful summer evening, when Christine had played it for him by the open window of her saloon, in her cottage at Haga. It was the song of Dalécarlie.

“Both in the boundless desert lost !”

“ You will play it to me often !” he had said to the countess on that memorable evening. Neither of them thought then, that she would ever play it, or that he would ever listen to it, under circumstances like the present.

A swarm of souvenirs were suddenly raised in his mind, singing and beating their wings ; he recollect ed the vanished joys of the past, those profound and pure joys with which he had so often been inebriated ; he remembered the inextinguishable and serene tenderness of every hour and of every moment ; that indefatigable and ingenious devotion always active ; that delicacy of spirit, and that *prévenance* of the heart, visible in little things as well as in large, as if she had found her supreme happiness in the gift of life incessantly renewed. Then he asked himself how he had paid these sacred debts of the heart ; he accused himself of ingratitude, and said to himself that his own precipitation had been a wrong towards Christine, and a culpable one ; and if she had been in any way to

blame, was not the fault his? If she had forgotten that there were two sides to the question, who had furnished the example? For the first time since he had taken his resolution, he was afraid. Doubt took possession of him, with its cortege of remorse and poignant bitterness. He acknowledged to himself that he had compromised his own happiness, and an internal monitor whispered to him, that he had destroyed the happiness of another; and when he looked around to seek for remedies for his fault, the preacher, the altar, his bride, his conscience, all responded: "*It is too late!*"

The spouses were kneeling upon the velvet cushions, listening to the final prayers; George buried his face in his hands, and forgot the world. The music of the organ, however, did not cease; it seemed to tremble under the nervous attacks of the unknown artist, who had resumed the primitive theme, and conducted it through those skillful variations which are like the shadows of the thought and the half tints of the sentiment. When the melody descends from the high sources of inspiration, it finds accents which move the heart and penetrate the soul. Emotion has everywhere the same language, and nothing resembles more a song of love, than a song of prayer. This song, discovered in the depth of the woods, by some dreaming peasant, improved by art, became in skillful hands, the harmonious poem of ineffable tenderness, and of hidden griefs.

Those who are familiar with the impassioned language of sounds, might have suspected the existence in the heart of the musician of one of those tragedies without words, of the inner life, which is performed

in the depths of the soul in its supreme moments. Sometimes the melodious phrase seemed to be borne on a storm of burning notes ; a feverish ardor precipitated its inviting rhythm ; sometimes it was rocked like a breath of a sweet reverie, and its melancholy seemed to smile ; but people might have asked of how many tears such smiles were composed. Suddenly the keyboard was troubled, the interrupted rhythm slipped away under the fingers which had now lost their control ; the measure, at once abrupt and languishing, vacillated like a flame in the wind. In the assembly they scarcely breathed. Soon the sorrowing artist gathered up her dispersed forces, as if for a last effort ; she inspired with her own ardor the insensible key-board with the burning notes which escaped from it, with the amorous effluvia running through the atmosphere. Then all at once calmness reigned ; the harmonious tempest was appeased ; the primitive phrase reappeared, sweet, naïve and simple, like a sigh from the heart of a young girl ; and slowly it expired under the trembling touches, like the complaint one hushes on the lips with a kiss !

The ceremony was finished, and the crowd went out under a tumult of emotions impossible to describe. They had nearly forgotten the spouses. Some young men were grouped around the doors of the chapel, waiting to see the organist : "she plays," they said, "as Jenny Lind would have sung." They waited in vain. When the Swiss came to close the doors, they interrogated him. He replied that he did not know who it was ; that the organ gallery opened into the convent, and that it was useless for them to wait there, for no one was likely to pass out.

CHAPTER XVI.

MAÏA, CHRISTINE AND THE MAJOR.

CHRISTINE, need we name her to the reader ? returned to her own house through one of the side streets which run along by the side of the vast gardens of the convent. She found Maïa established in her saloon. The Baroness de Bjorn had arrived in Stockholm, during the time of the ceremony, and she had ran immediately to the house of her friend, and not finding her, she had waited for her, a prey to great anxiety. Mme. de Rudden, no longer sustained by the febrile excitement of the crisis, threw herself, or rather, fell, into the arms of the young baroness. A profound sob relieved her chest ; her eyes were dry, but her hands trembled, and her face burned on Maïa's shoulder, on which it was lying. Maïa took her head and kissed it tenderly, then pushed it a little away from her as if the better to contemplate her. She was frightened at the rapid change that suffering had produced on that once beautiful face. There is an age when women ought no longer to suffer ; they are in a state of preservation only when they are happy ; the storms of misfortune despoil them, as the storms of the atmosphere do the last roses of autumn.

“It is not I !” murmured Christine ; “you cannot recognise me !”

Maïa made her sit down near the fire, and took off her hat and pelisse. Christine was as helpless as a sick infant. Maïa got upon her knees before her and warmed her two hands in her own.

"Speak to me," she said, suddenly; "you frighten me."

"I frighten you!" Christine repeated, like an echo.

"Yes," replied Maïa; "here it is eighteen months since I have seen you, and you do not even look at me!"

"I frighten you to-day; to-morrow you will pity me."

"Be silent," said Maïa; "I like your silence better. You are revolving, I am sure, some wicked thought in your poor head. Swear to me that you will never—."

"What?" said Christine. Then comprehending all at once—"kill myself;" and she added, with a look in which might be measured the profoundness of her despair; "To kill one's self! It is only the impatient who kill themselves.] What is the use? Can one not die?"

"Ah!" replied Maïa; "you are cruel towards those who love you."

"Those I love, have been so good to me!" she responded with a wandering smile.

"Enough," said Maïa, with an authoritative tone; "it is enough; chase away the souvenir; forget it."

"Forget!—how is that done? I never knew."

"Ah!" replied her friend; "you are right, dear Christine; I cannot even console you. Let me cry with you!"

Christine was seated on a large arm-chair in the corner of the fireplace. Maïa was still at her feet, with her head laid upon her knees. Soon Christine felt her hands wet with warm tears. By degrees her nerves were relaxed; her sobs, a long time repressed, burst forth; then her tears flowed abundantly and she was a little calmed. In grief as in joy, tears are always the overflow of the heart.

Maïa, under the ingenious pretext, that a house a long time uninhabited is cold and unhealthy, persuaded her husband to allow her to remain with Christine, that she might contribute to ameliorate the first effects of her great grief, which so often overcomes nervous organizations. They lived thus together, nearly two weeks in kindly intimacy, receiving no one but the Chevalier Valborg—who finally comprehended the extent and the intensity of the mischief he had done—and the major, who had all the delicacy, as he had all the ardor, of a true love. He comprehended too well, the sadness of Christine not to respect it. Two days before the marriage he had quitted Stockholm, and he only returned a week after. He observed those silent proprieties of the heart, which no civilization inscribes on its puerile and honest code, but which so well become certain natures.

The presence of Maïa, rendered possible the most frequent assiduities on his part towards Christine. He essayed to divert her. Finally, assured of the support of the baroness, he spoke of their marriage. This word frightened Christine for two days; regrets have also their decencies. The major thought he had been too hasty, and he resolved to be more patient in the future; and his silence was understood.

One morning they breakfasted together. Christine, who had remarked his sadness, extended her hand to him and said :

“ My friend, I have a favor to ask of you ? ”

“ Speak, dear Christine, you know it is granted in advance.”

“ See how good he is ! ” she said, turning towards Maïa.

"Yes," said Maïa; "I know that he is a king among men; my dear baron must take a back seat where he is."

"Well, my friend," Christine replied, "you must pardon me the wrong I have done you."

A lively emotion was manifested on the major's face; but he did not reply.

"What do you wish to say?" inquired Maïa, anxiously.

"My friend," said Christine; "I am not well; my health is failing."

"I see it is;" said the baroness.

"And you do not speak to me about it!"

"Only because I do not know how to cure you;" replied Maïa, shaking her head; "at least, at present;" she added, smiling.

"Neither now, nor never, I am afraid;" replied Christine.

"Always these foolish notions!" said Maïa, shrugging her shoulders.

We must not think to-day, then, of a marriage which _____."

"Which you do not desire;" interrupted the major.

"_____ For which my strength is unequal," replied Christine.

"As you wish, countess; you do not need to be told my sentiments; you know them already. What you do is always right."

"You do not lose much;" she replied, looking at her thin arms and transparent hands.

"Each one must be the judge of his own misfortune;" said the baron, with a sad smile. "I do not grieve; but allow me at least to think that I ought to."

"Ah!" murmured Christine; burying her head in her hands; "life is a cruel game! What noble hearts are lacerated; misfortune is upon me! My God, what can be done!"

"Everything for you, Christine; nothing for me!"

"He loves me as I have loved another!" thought Christine.

"If you wish," replied the major; "I will never return."

"Oh, no!" said she. "No, remain here. You and Maïa are now my only friends. If you leave me, I shall be entirely alone . . . and it is not yet time. A little patience! Now, I want you to be about me. You will, will you not?"

The baron turned towards Maïa without saying a word, and extending her hands to them, she continued:

"My dear friends, it is I who have the right to be humble."

CHAPTER XVII.

THE BEGINNING OF THE END—INTERVIEW OF THE COUNT AND
MAÏA—DEATH-BED.

With the count the season of the honey-moon ran away in a sort of a fever of pleasures; in the midst of fêtes and of wild dissipation. Nadéje drew him after her; he had no time to be unhappy.

But at the first realization, in the interval of pleasures, the thought of Christine came back to him, and having returned, it took complete possession of him, and remorse troubled all his joys. He soon discovered that

Nadéje was not what he had thought her to be, and his chastisement began. He supposed that he had married a woman ; he found she was only a doll, whose whole life was passed in dressing and undressing. Stockholm was dazzled with her toilettes ; but the women who sport fine dresses afford more pleasure, generally, to others, than to their own husbands. To tell the truth, since he was married, George had no longer any domestic life. He experienced some moments of ennui and his thoughts revelled in the past. He was certain now, that he had made the great mistake of his life. It often happens so in this world. Like all who are unhappy, he became unjust, and inverting the past, he accused Christine of having sacrificed him ! When he was alone, he thought only of the many charming hours he had passed in her society. He soon perceived that Nadéje did not love him, and he suffered from it ; not in his affections, for his love had never been really awakened ; but in his pride, till now so adroitly flattered, and at last so rudely deceived. He saw clearly that ambition and interest had guided her choice, and he experienced a secret discontent, which a thousand things occurring every day only served to irritate.

About many things Nadéje and he did not agree, and about many others, Nadéje had not even an opinion. When a point of bitterness between them became the occasion of a quarrel, George thought of that profound sympathy between Christine and himself, where one often finished the speech the other had begun, as if both had had but one thought. He said to himself, that in place of being an obstacle in his life, she had been his strength, his counsel, and his reason. He soon became very jealous of the baron. Jealousy was the only

feature of his love with which Christine had never been made acquainted.

He was astonished that the marriage of the countess should make so little noise in Stockholm, and wondered why the people had not more consideration for her. In place of being pleased at this, it only irritated him. Finally he interrogated the Chevalier Valborg, the only one of their mutual friends, whom he was in the habit of meeting.

"She is not married!" said the Chevalier; "and if I can believe the Baron de Vendel; if I can believe myself, she never will marry. Ah, my dear count, you are a dangerous man; this time I do not compliment you; you have broken the heart of a poor woman who merited better things from you."

These words of de Valborg were, for George, the last ounce to break the camel's back! He ran immediately to see the countess, wild with grief. *a tout*.

He was told that Mme. de Rudden had gone out. He returned three times in two days, and at the last attempt, he tried to force the door, which a groom dared not to defend; but the old valet de chambre, came running up and demanded:

"What does Monsieur want?"

"Can I not see the countess?"

"She cannot be seen."

"Not even by me?"

The old servant looked at him without replying.

"Does Mme. de Rudden not receive?"

"No, Monsieur."

"When does she receive?"

"Mme. la Comtess has not told me!"

George returned home very sad,

His was a nature at once feeble and violent, and obstacles only irritated it. The woman he could not obtain was precisely the one he would be the most likely to love. His regrets were so mingled with remorse that he entered into a phase of moral torture which became in his own eyes, the beginning of expiation. Nadéje perceived his sadness only to complain of it; she even let fall some words of bitter recrimination, which were not calculated to calm the already troubled mind of the Count de Simaine.

Some days subsequently he met Mme. de Bjorn; he knew her slightly, and knew that she was the intimate friend of the countess. He went directly up to her. She endeavored to avoid him; but he appeared so unhappy that she had not the heart to do it.

"If you knew what I suffer," he said.

"You are only expiating your own fault," replied the baroness.

The friend of the countess was nearly his own age; she was a piquant blonde; a poet of the court had compared her eyes to two little will o' the wisps; they were so restless. Mme. de Bjorn was small, and merited the sobriquet she had received of *petite baronne*; without being handsome, she was charming; her cheeks, her hands, and her shoulders lodged in their dimples, little nests of love. She was, moreover, lively, petulant, and carried her heart in her hand, and her hand open. She did not make merchandize of truth with any one, and made herself feared by those she did not love.

"I have not the honor to understand you," said the count; who knew that all bad cases were traversible; "pray explain yourself!"

"No; it would take too much time, and would be

useless ; if your conscience does not tell you, I cannot enlighten you."

Maïa spoke this in a tone which did not permit any reply.

"It is the way with you all," she continued ; looking at him fixedly ; "because you know how to make love ; you think that all is said and that nothing more can be demanded from you ; you kill a woman by your inconstancies and your frivolities ; you marry one, while another is dying for you, and they have a right to complain of you !" she added with an irony much more poignant than before : "No ; suffer, Monsieur, as you have caused another to suffer ! it is what must happen to you, if there be any justice here below."

"Look at me !" cried the count, taking her hand, "and tell me if I am not sufficiently punished !"

"Yes," replied Maïa, softening in her manner ; "I see that you are unhappy, and that helps me to accord to you some excuse ; if I could forget what is before my eyes every day—Oh, if you were to witness as I do, the tortures of a wounded heart !—"

"This is more than I can bear," said he, jumping up ; "let us go to see her, I beg of you !"

"No, no. I forbid it ; she is not prepared to see you."

"As you will," he murmured, bowing his head.

Maïa was not yet disarmed ; she profited by, she abused, perhaps, the silence of the count's depression ; and without pity—with that eloquence peculiar to women, and which they sometimes possess in so high a degree when passion speaks through them—she painted the love of Christine, so ardent, that, having no other aliment, it devoured itself ; so profoundly, devoted, that

to assure the happiness of others, there was no sacrifice she would not make, even to that of herself; a love, such, in a word, as a man never meets twice in his life. As to her marriage with the baron, it was only a fable; she had never thought of it, for she would never have consented to give pain to a man worthy of her esteem who suffered for her; she had not absolutely repulsed him, because she did not wish to owe George's love to a scruple, or to a remorse.

"I have loved her with all my heart," said George.

"We see very well that it is not so, for you have married another. Could she not be jealous as well as you? Could she not suffer as well as you? But Mlle. Borgiloff did not throw herself into the arms of the Baron de Vendel!"

George could find no reply; he experienced that species of vertigo which we sometimes have when bending over a precipice.

"Leave me now," said the baroness; "it is two o'clock. I must go to her."

"Carry my respects to her; my regrets," he murmured, in a deep, supplicating voice; he would have added, "my love;" but he dared not.

Some moments later she entered the countess's house. Christine was extended on a sofa; she got up as quick as her strength permitted her, and ran to her friend.

"You have seen him!" she said, observing her anxiety; "you have seen George!"

Maïa took her in her arms, kissed her, and gently re-seated her.

"If you do not keep calm, you will never learn anything."

"But you can see that I am calm," said Christine; hiding her trembling hands. "I am very calm; pray go on!"

Maïa was obliged to describe her interview with the count, and she took all sorts of precautions so to relate it, as to produce the least possible excitement in the bosom of her friend.

"No: everything; tell me everything;" cried the countess; and Maïa recounted the interview with the most scrupulous exactitude. Once or twice it happened, that she made use of an expression George had used.

"Oh, I recognise that;" she said, "he used to talk so; it seems to me that I hear him now! I distinguish his accent and his voice; a charming voice whose silvery tone——."

Maïa saw very well that she had excited her, but she allowed the crisis to follow its course; hoping, even, for some amelioration of its violence. It was the first time since George's marriage, that she had spoken with so much *abandon*.

"And," she continued, when Maïa finished her recital, "he is not even happy, and I am uselessly lost!" and she was heard from time to time repeating to herself the phrase, "he is not happy!"

Perhaps those who have studied most carefully the human heart—that of woman, particularly—may pretend, that in the midst of her regrets, so intense and so severe, there took possession of her, unknown to herself—a secret joy, at seeing that George had not found with another, that happiness which he had enjoyed with her; that nothing had chased away her image, and that he still loved her.

Maïa watched her attentively, and said, taking her burning hand in her own, “do you wish to see him?”

Throwing herself upon Maïa’s neck, she replied, “yes!” Then raising her head, she became suddenly pale, put her hand on her bosom, and after a moment’s reflection continued: “No, no; that cannot be; it must not be! Not now! at least, not yet,—by and bye;” with a smile which would have made George wild with love and with grief.

George had, however, given himself up devotedly to society; it was necessary to him; if only to avoid useless scandal. Through routs and soirées he dragged the matrimonial chain like a galley-slave of marriage. The women who did not see Christine any more, began to complain. She did not go out; she hid her grief in her own heart. Maïa cared for her as though she had been her sister. There happened two or three fine mornings in March. One day the sun penetrated her windows with its golden rays, and Maïa throwing a pelisse of fur over the countess’s shoulders, said :

“Come, let us go and imbibe some fresh air; it will do you good.”

The carriage was at the door.

“Where shall we go?”

“I do not know; wherever you will; it is all the same to me. Let us go to Djurgaard, for instance.”

“Be it so;” said Christine.

The carriage passed through the faubourgs along the basins of the port,—whose ice disturbed by the waves of the Baltic, was already breaking up—passed before the caserne of the king, and soon entered a superb park, strewed with villas, with chateaux, with gardens,

with theatres in full blast, with *cafés* in the open air ; where the loungers make their Sunday fêtes and come to rejoice during the fine evenings of summer. They got out near the Chateau de Rosendal (the valley of roses) not far from that fine porphyry cup, the largest in the world, whose dimensions, the English traveler never fails to measure with his cane. Christine was invigorated and could walk.

“ Let us go to the oaks ! ” said Maïa.

A long avenue of pines, laid out on undulating ground, led to that portion of the park where several avenues meet ; where a gigantic bouquet of centenarian oaks—projecting their strong roots between the rocky granite—spread their floating branches to the breeze. The two women traversed at a slow pace, a glade of close-cut grass ; but, at the moment when they were about to take another path, which led to a little Swiss *chalet* overlooking the sea in the distance, Christine suddenly stopped ; she saw George coming towards her.

She looked at Maïa.

“ I knew it ! ” said Mme. de Bjorn.

The women took seats and George came up and stood before them a moment, immobile and mute. He raised his eyes, and seeing Christine so much changed, he was profoundly moved.

“ I frighten you, George ! ” she said, remarking his emotion and turning to her friend, she continued : “ You see that he loves me still ! ”

“ Oh, always ! and more than ever,” he said.

“ Be silent ;” she replied, raising her hand as if to lay it upon the count’s lips ; “ be silent ; you have no right to say that to me.”

"It is true," said he ; "but I have at least the right to accuse myself of not having appreciated the dearest and most adorable of women!"

"Do not accuse yourself," replied Christine, "without doubt I have no right to be happy. There has been in my life, more than one cruel misapprehension ; this one has been the most cruel of all. But loyalty is saved at any rate ; console yourself, for now I believe that I love my grief." Insensibly she was becoming excited, and Maïa perceiving it, said :

"Christine, we must go ;" and she arose.

"Wait a minute," said George.

The countess said nothing, but looked at her friend.

"Impossible !" replied Maïa, "it is enough. We have stayed too long already."

"Shall I ever see you again ?" inquired George.

"I should desire it," replied Christine ; "but that would be wrong ; you are the husband of another. I will be frank and true to the end, even against myself ! I owed this interview, perhaps, to your grief, and to our past —— more I cannot ! adieu !"

The count was in a paroxysm of violent despair.

"George," said she, taking his hand ; "spare me ; leave me my conscience. What will remain to me, if that does not ?"

Maïa was a little distance away, but she returned to Christine and took her arm. The countess attempted to rise, but her strength failed her and she resumed her seat, leaning her head against the trunk of an oak, against which they had placed their rustic seat. A hectic flush appeared on her cheeks, and a dry cough lacerated her chest. Looking at Maïa, she began to grow pale, and removing the handkerchief which she

had been holding to her lips—George perceived that it was discolored with blood. He was speechless with grief. Finally, the countess made an extraordinary effort, and taking Maïa's arm, she bade adieu to the count.

"Do not follow us," Mme. de Bjorn said to him, "our people are at the *chalet* and they must not see you."

He stood motionless in the same place, looking at them. Soon the two women entered a path lined with spice and tamarind trees, and passing an angle were entirely lost to his view. George remaining alone, buried himself in one of the most sombre copses of the park, and did not return home until towards evening. Nadéje had dined without waiting for him, and had already gone to the house of one of her friends, where they were repeating a certain quadrille, called *the lancers*, an old rejuvenated dance, that two coxcombs of Vienna had brought to Sweden. He could then enjoy in peace the bitter reminiscences of his sorrow, and savor with his tears what the English poet calls, *the joy of grief*. He respected too carefully the wishes of his unhappy friend, to present himself at her house; but he passed before it every day, and at least saw the place where she lived. One morning he found the blinds closed; a neighbor told him that the countess had left Stockholm.

Several days subsequently he received a letter bearing the post-mark of Lubec. The baroness announced, that in consequence of constantly failing health, Christine had quitted Sweden to seek a more genial climate. He then remained three months without any news of her whatever, abandoned to all the tortures of uncertainty.

One morning M. de Simaine was busy in his office, when a domestic, without livery, was ushered in. The man came to announce that a lady was waiting to see him in a carriage in a neighboring street which he named. George followed him, and soon found the carriage. A handkerchief was waved, and the door opened ; he got in and the driver, without waiting for any further orders, whipped up his horses, and drove off. Through the double folds of a black veil, George recognised Maïa whose blonde hair illuminated her face. He watched her with profound inquietude, not daring to interrogate her, or to utter the name which was trembling on his lips.

“ You must see her now !” said the baroness, pressing his hand.

She raised her veil and he saw that she had been crying.

“ And Christine ?” he inquired.

“ You are going to see her,” said Maïa ; “ courage !”

And they passed rapidly on the way to Haga ; the familiar route which he had so often traveled to see the countess in happier days.

The foaming team passed through the gate his trembling hand had so often opened. They drove around a carpet of English grass, planted with bouquets of trees, and stopped at the foot of a flight of steps whose balusters were covered with ivy and honeysuckle. It was a beautiful morning ; June was smiling on the amorous earth ; the feathered songsters were heard in all the trees ; the sun inundated the room with its benignant rays, and the fragrance of flowers was everywhere observed.

George got down from the carriage, but it was with difficulty that Maïa followed him. Two greyhounds,

favorites of Christine, guarded the upper stair. They recognised George, by jumping upon him and licking his hands as usual.

"How they would hate me!" thought he, "if they knew me better."^{They should}

At the sound of the approaching carriage, the old valet de chambre of the countess appeared.

"How is she?" inquired the baroness.

"She thinks she is better."

"And you, Niels, how are you?"

"Worse."

"Take care of yourself," she said, "and be strong for her, if not for yourself."

"Let us go in now," said George; "I cannot wait," and he went towards Christine's room.

"Not there," said Niels, shaking his head. "Here!" showing the way to the saloon.

"Wait till I announce you," said Maïa, who went in first.

"He is there; I know he is there," said Christine; "I see him," she continued, extending her arms towards the wall through which her ardent gaze seemed to penetrate.

"Oh, how she loves him yet," murmured M. de Vendel, who was seated near the window.

The door was opened, and George came in, and going to the sofa on which Christine was lying, fell on his knees before her. With her almost fleshless arms she embraced him, uttering his name in a voice so faint as hardly to be heard. George looked at her attentively, and was more struck with her beauty perhaps, than he had been on the day he first saw her. She was still beautiful. Her cheeks were animated with present

excitement; her eyes were illuminated with a strange fire, her beautiful hands which he had so often covered with kisses, seemed to have grown larger and thinner; her flesh looked like transparent wax, and the lightest pressure reddened its delicate whiteness. Her hair, untied, fell in thick waves over her shoulders, like a rivulet of fluid gold. She forgot the past; she forgot the future—the future which she could only now measure by minutes. Life for her was concentrated in the present moment. But the violence of her emotions exhausted her; the roses paled on her cheeks, her lips lost their color, her eyes lost their brightness, her head drooped, and she fainted.

Maïa took her in her arms and held smelling salts to her nostrils. The baron got up, and stepping up to the bed, pointed towards the countess, and looking at the count said :

“Behold what you have done!”

George looked, but did not reply; anguish sculptured on his visage, the image of grief. The baron regretted his violence, and seated himself again without saying a word. At a sign from Christine, Maïa and the baron left the room, and she and George were alone together. She was the first to speak.

“George,” said she, “my strength is failing; but I could not die without seeing you again.”

“Oh, Christine, pardon me!” he replied.

“What have I to pardon? You mistook the way, but that was not your fault. You went where you believed your happiness lay. Who would not have done the same?”

“Christine, be charitable; do not overwhelm me. I swear to you —”

"Swear not at all, my friend; I now know all. Ah, if you were only happy!"

"Can one be happy who has loved you and lost you?"

"Listen to me, George; for it is the last testament of my heart, that I now open to you. One day—you will remember it—when we began to love each other, when I received, with, oh, what profound joy, all those treasures of tenderness which you poured out at my feet, I promised myself that I would never be an obstacle to your happiness. Such an obstacle I believed myself to have become, the day on which you met —— she, who is to-day your wife. I saw your doubts; I saw your combats, your resistance, your noble efforts to remain at my side! and I loved you all the more for them. But I did not think I could make you happy any longer; your desires wandered far away. I realized all there was in you of generous pity, of delicate tenderness, of chivalric devotion; enough to make the happiness of ten others. It was not enough for me, George; and here is my fault. I have sinned from pride, but this pride was love still; I wished to give, not to receive. I violently broke the ties you would not have loosened. I accepted the appearance of a wrong—and you were free!"

"So you love me still?"

"Ah! I am dying of it, and can you ask me!"

"And I, Christine; my head alone has wandered; never my heart. I have always loved you. . . . I love you ——"

"Be silent! I beg of you; would you render death impossible to me?"

"Death, for you, never! it shall never come to you!"

"And Nadéje," she murmured.

"Nadéje? who is Nadéje? I do not know her; I will never see her again!"

"And where is duty?" she inquired, raising herself upon her elbow; "where is duty?—a great word and a great thing—which thy poor dying friend supplicates you never to forget. The time is no longer when we are both free! Oh, those happy days! How rapidly they passed! Do you remember those happy days? Before the sun leaves this window, George, I shall live no longer, except in your heart."

She spoke with so firm a conviction, and with so profound an accent of truth, that George saw very well that she could not be mistaken. He stifled his sobs in order not to trouble the serenity of her last moments; but his tears flowed freely.

"Why do you cry?" she inquired; "do you not know that we shall meet again?"

"Yes; and very soon."

"Not yet; I will forewarn you!" and an ineffable smile lighted up her lips, which closed immediately.

Maïa and the baron returned, and stood immobile, two steps from the bed. The sun turned the angle of the house and his rays quitted the death-bed.

"It is getting dark—I choke!" said Christine.

Maïa ran to open the window; a robin redbreast was singing in the flowering laburnum under which, more than once, Christine had sat, while George read some poet or talked of love at her feet. She took the hands of her three friends in her own, and, in a dying voice murmured:

"My friends, my dear friends! George! George!"

Her hand became rigid, and clasped George's convulsively.

Maïa, kneeling before her friend as she breathed her last, closed her eyes and lips; and the sweetest and most loving creature the world ever saw, quitted it forever!

* * * * *

On the morrow the count and the baron returned to Haga, to pay the last duties to the memory of their friend. Both accompanied her remains to their final resting-place in the funeral-chapel of the Oxen-Stjerna.

“We have loved her too well, not to love each other now, in memory of her,” said the major, as they stood over her tomb.

George squeezed the baron’s hand; but answered only with his tears.

CHAPTER XVIII.

CONCLUSION.

LIFE at Stockholm was now no longer supportable to M. de Simaine. His health failed, and he fell into a sort of marasmus; he was obliged to demand his recall. The physicians advised the air of France, and he set out on his return. The boat from Kiel stopped a day or two on its way, at Guttenburg.

George wandered about the environs in a frame of mind sad enough. The morning of his departure, an accident led him near to the cemetery, situated not far from the city, at the foot of a mountain, and bordered by a

meadow. The gate was open and he entered. The cemetery of Guttenburg is not monumental. They do not build in it granite and marble palaces to the rich defunct, or villas of stucco, but each tomb has its tree and its cross.

If you love to meditate among the tombs—if the sod covers one who was once near and dear to you, if it gratifies you to come here and commune with them, or to believe that you do—these cemeteries of the North, with their melancholy skies, their long alleys of lindens and of oaks, their bouquets of elms and of willows, will have an extreme charm for you.

The cemetery of Guttenburg is large; they do not dispute there, inch by inch, space for the last resting-place for the dead; their sacred sleep is not troubled there; to grief is spared all those gratuitous and shabby vexations which are allowed to irritate it elsewhere; one is not constrained even, to follow the vulgar alignment of official inhumations; they group in families. Sometimes a couple of friends isolate themselves in the shadow of a willow with its white foliage, united in death even, notwithstanding the words of the Master: “*Siccine separat amara mors!*” Death has never separated them; and, it is in the last sleep that they await the last awakening, together!

The count gathered a tuft of white heather from one of the tombs, hid it in his bosom, and went away. A blind man, on his knees near the gate, held a little wooden box up to him, murmuring, “*Pensez aux morts!*” George threw him a rixdale of silver and went away. The steamer sailed; and, when towards evening the coast of Sweden disappeared from his view, he felt as though he was losing Christine again.

He is now in Paris. He goes into society, insensible alike to its joys as to its griefs. Nadéje goes often to the ball; she is the queen of fashion—but, George retires early; he will not dance a cotillion.

Several women among those who are attracted by grief—a noble race fast vanishing away—would have been glad to console him, and help him to forget his love. He manifested towards them a cold politeness; always listened when they talked to him; but, he was always repeating to himself, “*Pensez aux morts!*”

END.





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